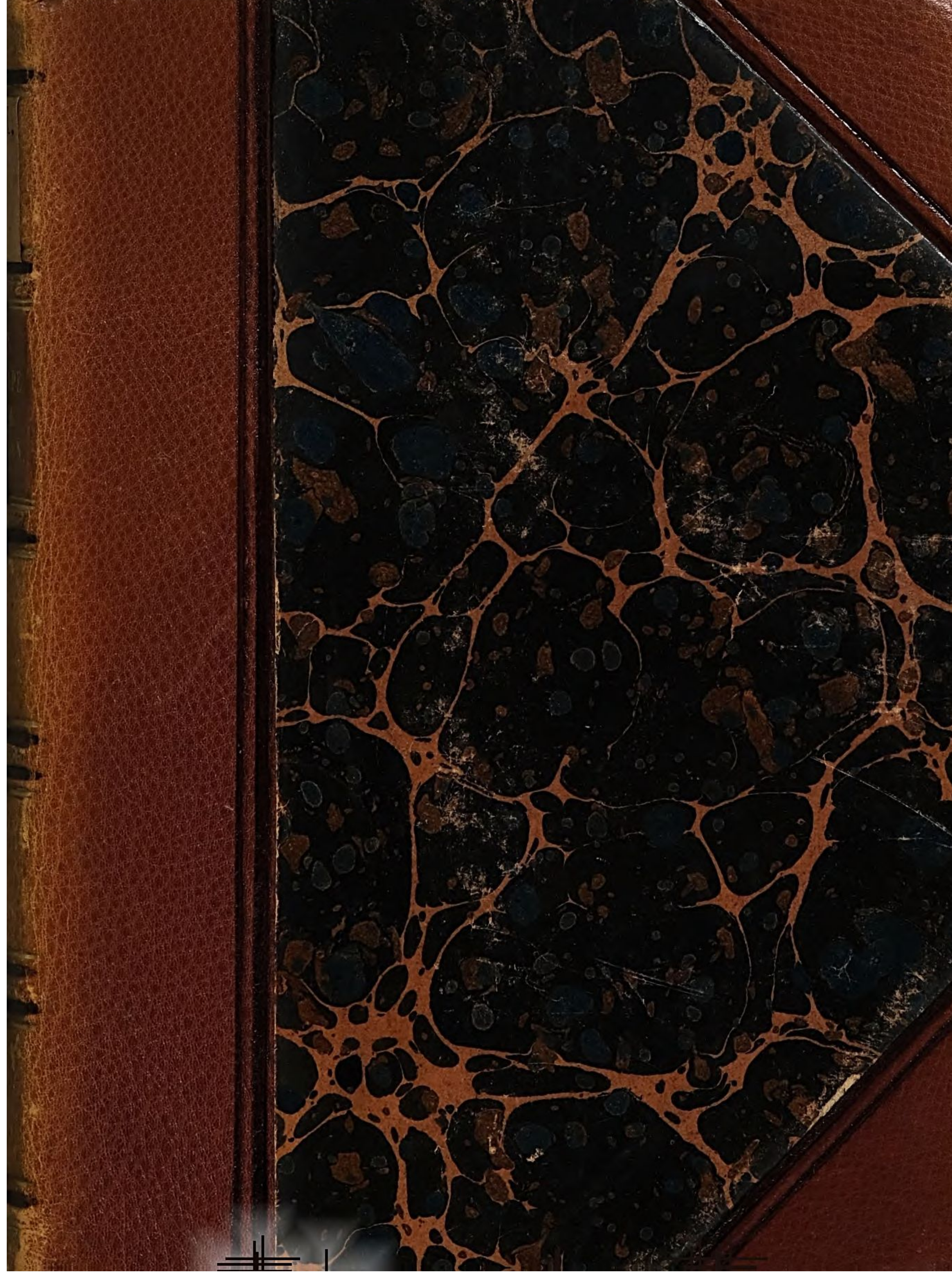
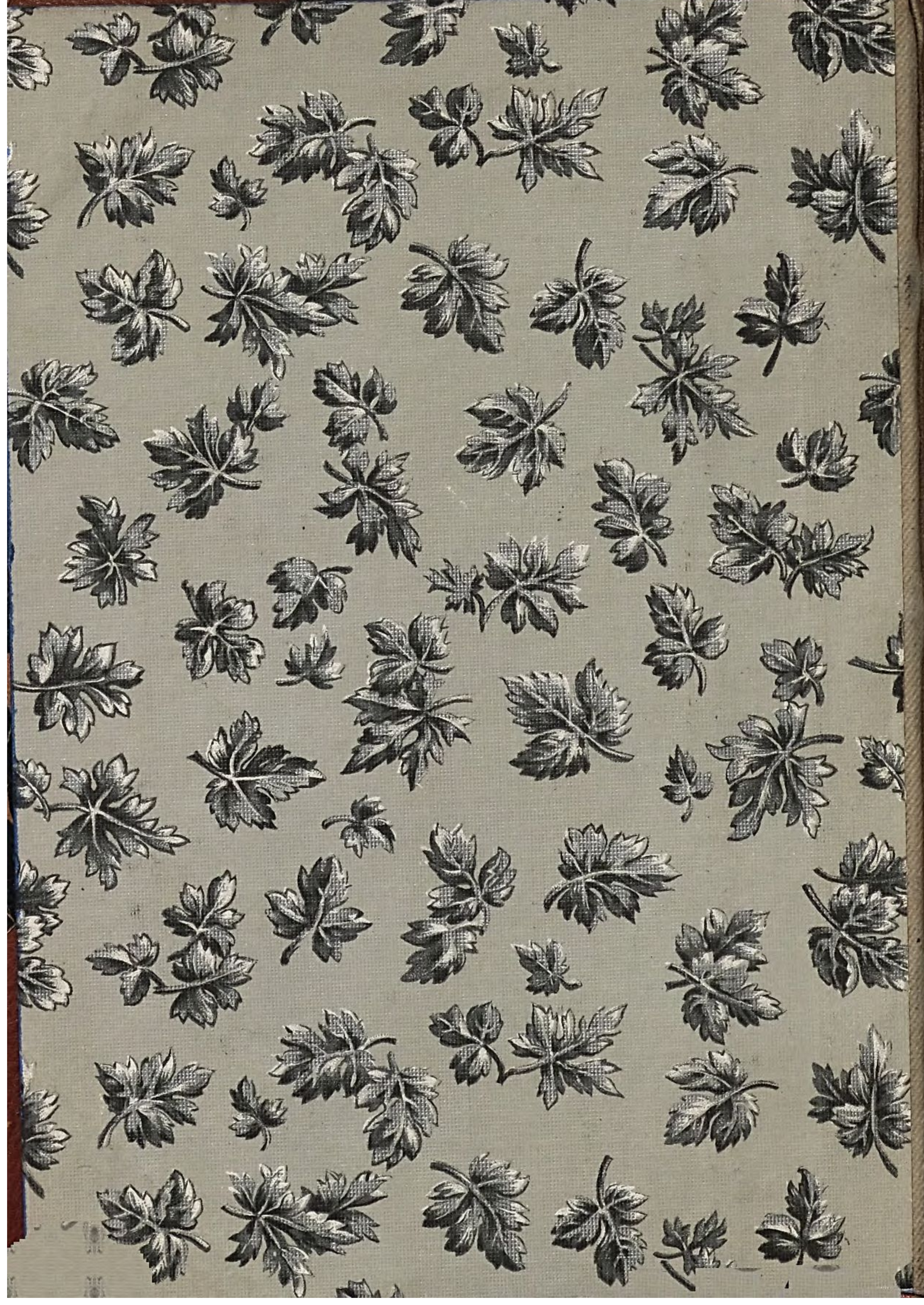








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A
GRAPE FROM A THORN

BY
JAMES PAYN,
AUTHOR OF "BY PROXY," "HIGH SPIRITS," ETC.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LEIPZIG
BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1882.

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TO

M I S S W R I G L E Y

OF TIMBERHURST, BURY, AND WANSFELL, WINDERMERE

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED

BY HER OLD FRIEND

THE AUTHOR.

TO

MISS WRIGHT

OF THE

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A GRAPE FROM A THORN.

CHAPTER I.

ON THE ROAD.

"ARE not four horses a little expensive, papa?"

This modest observation, in the French tongue, and expressed in a tone so gentle that it could hardly be called remonstrant, was made by a young lady of eighteen as she sat in a hired barouche in the High Street of Lawton, and in front of the "Angel in Boots," from which establishment (to the admiration of its proprietor) a supplementary pair of posters had just been ordered. It was unusual in that part of the country to travel with a postilion: so that two of them, with horses to match, awakened in the population of the little town what the poet calls "the hushed amaze of hand and eye;" they also opened their mouths exceedingly wide, and encircled the vehicle containing Mr. Josceline and his daughter to catch any crumb of information respecting those distinguished strangers, much like expectant goldfish. There had been no such excitement in the place since the travelling circus had pitched its tent there in the autumn of last year, and it was now mid-June.

It is possible that these good people, even if the horses and the "turn-out" had not been their chief attraction, might have failed to seize the more subtle shades of character in the two passengers thus offered to their observation; but one of them at least, had they been more skilful students of human nature, would have been well worth their study. The Hon. George Emilius Josceline was a gentleman whose aristocratic appearance and repose of manner showed to the utmost advantage in an open barouche. The afternoon was not very far advanced, yet an ample fur cloak was carelessly arranged about him, and the travelling cap which surmounted his already silvering head was drawn down to his ears. He was but forty-five, but had accomplished his life's journey at so quick a rate that he had considerably damaged his constitution, and had grown old before his time. This circumstance, however, gave a delicacy to his appearance that by no means detracted from its interesting character; his faded colour and wasted features looked very appropriate in the barouche and four, though if his legs had been visible, and one could have disengaged one's attention from the violet stockings and patent-leather shoes in which they terminated, you might (in ignorance of his rank) have called him spindle-shanked. He had a calm, exhausted smile which (as though he had been a prince of the blood who had passed his life in acknowledging the plaudits of the populace) suggested the ravages of affability.

His daughter, Ella, was not unlike him as to feature, and her complexion was perhaps somewhat too delicate to be associated with robust health, but

there was no trace in it of illness or languor. Her face was "pale and thinner than should be for one so young," but this did not arise from physical causes. She had what persons, in very different circles from those in which Mr. George Emilius Josceline was accustomed to move, are wont to term "enough to think about;" her father was the only relative she had in the world, and her friends were comprised within the four walls of a school at Clapham, from which she had but lately emerged to join Mr. Josceline on the Continent, where he had been living a nomad life (though by no means in tents) for many years. She knew little of his past, or of her own so far as it related to him; she had seen him, previous to the last six months, for only a few hours at a time, when he had called at Minerva Lodge to make inquiries about her of the schoolmistress, and to express his regret to her—which he did with graceful tenderness—that for the present, and until she should grow up, he had no home to offer her; and of her future she knew still less. Absolutely nothing, indeed, except that it must needs be but sparely provided for. She had gathered from observation—for no definite statement on the matter had ever been made to her—that her father was living at least up to his income; but this was a subject on which she had had no encouragement to speak. The first time, indeed, that she had ever hinted at it was on the present occasion, and even then with the utmost delicacy, and in the French tongue, in which, when they were alone together, Mr. Josceline (who had a curious repugnance to England and the English) preferred to converse.

"Are not four horses, papa, a little expensive?"

Mr. Josceline's smile expanded into a genial ray, and his calm grey eyes twinkled with subdued humour as he replied, "That is quite true, Ella; you are thinking that twice two are four. I am glad to find that Miss Steele included arithmetic in her curriculum of education, though the Parisian accent was an extra. You are improving, however, even in that, my dear, though, as it happens, a little late. It is not likely that any one at Wallington Bay will be critical on that point."

Ella did not speak; a little colour stole into her cheek, and a dew into her large brown eyes, for she felt that a reproof had been administered to her. She ought to have known better than to have interfered with her father's arrangements, for which, to do him justice, he had generally some sufficient reason. Whatever had been the motive for his thus travelling *en prince*, it certainly did not arise from ostentation. "Display," she had often heard him say, was "incompatible with comfort," and to be comfortable was his simple aim. But then Mr. George Emilius Josceline's notions of comfort were closely allied to other people's ideas of luxury.

The four horses started amid a feeble cheer from the crowd, and speedily carried them out of the quaint little town; the road was a very picturesque one, changing abruptly from open moorland to well-wooded lanes, where the trees in their early green made triumphal archways for their passage, and then again to rolling downland, with ever and anon a glimpse of the sea. They were traversing the fairest portion of the fairest county in the south of England, and the varied beauties of the landscape touched the

sensitive young girl to the core. She knew not what it was that ailed her, for she had never experienced such sensations before. She had known London and Paris, and of course had beheld the country that lies between them; but that was on a hurried railway journey, and even the English part of it was no match for the scenes that now surrounded her, enjoyed at ease and to the full. Every pastoral farm, every honeysuckled cottage by the brookside, looked to her as though she could have taken up her abode in them, and dwelt there happy for evermore. Under the softening influences of so much beauty she soon forgot her late rebuff, and, with that yearning for sympathy which belongs to youth, once more addressed herself to her companion.

"I was quite unprepared for the loveliness of this drive, papa; I never saw anything like it. *Is there anything like it out of England?*"

"I don't know that there is, my dear," returned Mr. Josceline, with a slight yawn. "There are twenty times finer views, however, in Italy and Switzerland."

"But not in France surely? Those straight level roads, with the Noah's ark-like trees on each side of them, I thought very wearisome."

"You reason from insufficient data, my dear child. You fell into the same error when you made that remark about the horses."

Ella bit her lip; she felt that she would rather have bitten her tongue off than have made that unhappy observation.

"I am very sorry, dear papa; I did not mean to annoy you."

"Nor have you annoyed me, my darling; on the whole, indeed, I am rather glad you said what you did. It gives me an opportunity of explaining myself on a matter which there is always a certain difficulty in approaching—— Dear me, are those deer in that park yonder?"

Mr. Josceline put up his eyeglasses, and gazed with some interest at a distant glade, where, under huge oaks, a herd of deer were standing deep in fern.

"Yes, papa; and what a quantity of them."

"What house is that yonder, postilion, and to whom does it belong?" inquired Mr. Josceline.

"It is Barton Castle, sir; Sir Everard Drake's," returned the man, turning round in his saddle. "Sir Everard himself don't live there."

"Quite right; it must be very dull," mused the other, half to himself. "Somebody lives there, however, I suppose; I see smoke from the chimney."

"Oh, yes, sir, a party has taken it; but nobody sees nothing of him. He's a Miss—a Miss——; but there, I forget what they call him."

"But if it's a Miss it must be a lady, my good fellow."

"But it ain't, sir; it's a gentleman. He's very good to the poor, and the beer in the servants' hall is as good as any in the county; but he don't go out nowhere, and shuts himself up—it's a Mr. Charles Edwards."

"He means a misanthrope, papa," said Ella, laughing.

"Ah! that's the name, Miss, because I heard the parson talking about him, and his never coming to church like a Christian."

If going to church was the test of Christianity, Mr. Josceline himself was out of the fold; and perhaps the chance shot of the postilion hit his conscience, for he suddenly became very grave and silent. Yet he was not a man whose conscience was often hit, or when hit, much hurt. He kept it in subjection under him as a wise man keeps his stomach.

"And what makes this Mr. Edwards a misanthrope?" continued Ella, not perceiving the alteration in her father's manner, and not a little amused by that of the postilion.

"Well, Miss, I don't understand the rights of it, not I; but they do say as Mr. Edwards is a Dook in disguise."

"How far is Barton Castle from Wallington Bay?" inquired Mr. Josceline, sharply.

"Well, a matter of five miles and more, sir: and a deal further, as you may see for yourself, from the Bay to the Castle."

He pointed with his whip down the road, which was a continuous descent, so that in time, at least, if not in distance, their position in respect to one another was, in fact, as the man had described.

"I see," said Mr. Josceline, with a stately inclination of his head to signify the conclusion of his inquiries; "the road is steep, keep your eye on your horses."

"What could the man mean, papa," inquired Ella, "by saying that the gentleman who lives yonder is a duke in disguise?"

"Heaven knows; in England everybody's head runs on dukes." Yet, despite his indifference, Mr. Josceline continued to regard Barton Castle with some atten-

tion; and, even when they had passed by it, he turned round more than once to look at its main tower, which showed with its flagstaff above the surrounding trees.

"When Mr. Edwards is there they puts the flag up," explained the man, whose tongue, once set agoing on so favourite a topic, it was not easy to stop; "when he isn't they doesn't—just like the Queen at Windsor."

Even to this Ella perceived her father paid some attention, though it was very unusual for him, she knew, to take interest in local gossip. That the incident had been sufficient to divert him from his proposed "explanation," did not, however, surprise her. He not only always found "a difficulty," as he expressed it, in approaching any matter of business, but especially any topic of a serious nature that had reference to themselves; and, even when commenced, he would seize upon the slightest pretext to fly from it. Ella knew her father thoroughly as respected his likes and dislikes, his habits and "ways," though, as we have said, she was in almost complete ignorance of his position in the world. She understood that he was a man of rank who had fallen out with his relatives, who held no communication with him, but how the estrangement had taken place she did not understand. She also knew that she was an only child, and that her mother had died when she was very young; beyond these facts her schoolmistress, Miss Steele, had told her nothing, and there was that in her father's manner which prevented her making further inquiries. She loved him dearly, and would have done so had he been even less kind and in-

dulgent; but her filial affection for him—from the absence of all confidence on his part—was incomplete.

The road now dipped between two hills which, opening before them like giant gates, disclosed a glorious view—a landlocked bay, the blue waters of which contrasted most charmingly with steep cliffs of red sandstone. In a picture such diversity of colour would have seemed unnatural; but the cunning artist, Nature, who sets at naught “the falsehood of extremes,” had so wrought it that the scene seemed like a prevision of Paradise itself.

“How very, very lovely!” exclaimed Ella, in a transport of subdued delight. “Oh, papa, how glad I am you thought of coming to Wallington Bay!”

“With regard to the four horses,” observed Mr. Josceline, gravely, whose eyes were fixed on the fur cloak before him, and did not extend their patronage to the landscape notwithstanding Ella’s eulogy of it, “they are, as you say, rather expensive, but, looked at from a proper point of view, they will appear anything but extravagant. At a place like the *Ultramarine*, an hotel used mainly by the rich middle classes, the extra pair will, in the eyes of its inmates, more than double, I will not say our income—for that would be far from having an imposing effect—but our supposed income.”

“But, dear papa,” pleaded the girl, softly, “is not that a species of deception?”

“Our leaders will be *mis*leaders, my dear, to those who choose to be guided by them, of course; but that will not be our fault. It is a very cheap method, at all events, of establishing ourselves at once at the top of the tree—the best position, that is, for looking about

us and deciding upon the most eligible spot"—he was about to say—"to roost;" but an expression in his daughter's face, of anxiety, if not alarm, caused him to alter the expression to "perch"—a word, moreover, he pronounced in a light and airy tone suggestive of the action.

Nor even then did it seem to him that he had done enough to remove a certain impression of seriousness of aim which the speech had involuntarily conveyed, since, for the rest of the way, he exerted himself to amuse and interest his companion as though she had been a person of consequence in no way related to him. He was a master of the conversational art; but it took all he knew to effect his object, and it was with no slight sense of relief that he at last perceived the goal of their journey.

"Yonder is the inn!" he exclaimed; "a handsome house enough, one must allow, and standing in quite a little park of its own: but, for all that, I have a presentiment that the cooking will play the deuce with my digestion, and that we shall be poisoned with bad wine."

CHAPTER II.

THE ARRIVAL.

MR. JOSCELINE'S eulogium upon the inn at Wallington Bay was not undeserved. It was a large rambling building of very ancient date, but which had been added to at various epochs. It had once been the Prior's house, attached to the abbey (the ruins of which still stood in the grounds); and, when the latter

had been destroyed by bluff King Hal's commissioner sent down to investigate into the alleged malpractices of its tenants, he had spared the dwelling-house as being unconnected with any spiritual shortcomings, and also because it was exceedingly comfortable and convenient, and obtained a grant of it for himself. There he had lived till judgment had overtaken him, which had also, with fine nose, pursued every subsequent inhabitant. None who took the Prior's house had prospered, though the last tenant had done his best to wash away the stains that clung to it by turning it into a hydropathic establishment. His ruin had been more complete, if less picturesque, than that of the abbey itself. Curiously enough the house, built of red sandstone, and fairly glowing against its background of short, thick-stemmed trees, their branches all blown about by the all-prevailing wind, stood stoutly as ever. The stately pile seemed as little fitted for an inn as might be; but there was no choice for the proprietor (after its hydropathic stage) between that and a madhouse, and an inn, therefore, it had become. Mrs. Trant, the landlady, had been greatly puzzled for a proper name for it, and had consulted Mr. Michael Felspar, the artist (who had made Wallington Bay his own by reason of the many pictures he had painted of it), on this important subject.

"I am advised to call it the *Marine Hotel*; but it looks something quite beyond that, now don't it, sir?"

"Of course it does. Why not call it the *Ultramarine*?" And as she saw no objection, nor yet the joke, the *Ultramarine* it was called accordingly.

What was very singular—and this may prove of the utmost benefit to the proprietors of great houses

suffering under theological and hereditary curses—was, that the hotel was succeeding; no doubt from the circumstance of its being in the hands of a company. There being such a lot of them, the ban probably did not know where to settle, and, thoroughly disgusted, took itself off altogether. On the other hand, some credit must be due to Mrs. Trant's management of the establishment. It was one of the few inns in England where the salad oil could be depended upon, and the sheets tucked up at the foot of the beds. And then the situation was absolutely unrivalled; perhaps it would be better to add, and indescribable; for I have observed this of descriptions of places, even by master-hands like that of Walter Scott, that when one has read and apparently understood them in every detail, and one afterwards visits the place described, it is utterly and entirely different from what one has been led to expect. On the other hand, if you are already acquainted with the spot, you recognise the description readily. At the date of which I speak (though there is now, alas! a change in that respect), the world at large knew nothing of Wallington Bay; one of the things that made its situation "unrivalled" was that it was twenty miles from the nearest railway, and therefore very difficult of approach—an inconvenience which greatly added to its charm in the opinion of those who, from the hotel point of view, were most worth knowing. For the aristocracy, indeed, it was too dull; but for the wealthy middle class, who were diligently learning to be exclusive, and also to profess to admire the beauties of nature, it had great attractions. With them Wallington Bay had already achieved such a reputation that it was known among

them familiarly as "the Bay"—just as the old Duke of Wellington was called "the Duke"—as though there was but one bay in the world.

A little cove that thought itself a bey,

Felspar had once termed it; but this flight of Eastern imagery was due to his picture of the abbey having been "skied" in the Academy, which made his humour a little tart that year. It was in truth a glorious bay, with twenty feet of water up to the very beach, and a little island in the middle of it, with a cavern even yet in the occasional occupation of sea-nymphs; for in front of it was a sloping sand that shone at low water in the sun like diamond dust, and here the young ladies of the hotel, conveyed by trusty boatmen, would bathe in calm weather, concealed from sight (save of the Tritons) by a wooded cliff.

Eastward and westward one might walk for miles along the cliff top, or stray down by zigzag paths into creek and cove, each known to local fame for quaint-shaped rock or wave-worn hollow. On the first promontory on the western side stood the coastguard station, white as a star, a very castle of indolence as it seemed to those who visited it in calm weather, and beheld its inmates pacing their chalk-marked path, or stretched at full length on the sunny sward, sweeping the sea with their glasses; but when the ocean rose in wrath, and the little storm-bell on the boathouse below began to swing in sign of danger to the mariner, to see the coastguard men race down the cliff, and take their allotted stations in the galley, was a sight to quicken your own pulses, aye, and if you chanced to have one, to bring your heart into

your mouth, in sympathy with such self-sacrifice and courage. On the opposite promontory was another sort of station belonging to another epoch. There the Danes, having landed some thousand years ago or so, and found the place to their liking, had dug great trenches and made a camp for themselves—and for the delight of archæologists. No more its sentries looked to northward for the native foe, nor to southward and to sea for their kinsmen; no more their raven flapped its wing upon the wind-swept summit. Peace reigned on the Danecliff now, its wildest visitant the white-winged gull; and all the summer long the grass-grown ramparts were alive with butterfly and bee, and sweet with thyme, and in the autumn crowned with purple heath.

Wallington Village, though not, I suppose, “as old as the hills,” looked quite in keeping with them; its cottages were all of stone, on which the mosses of many years had accumulated, and each had its little garden in which fuchsias flourished like trees, evidencing the mildness of the climate; while on their roofs, as if in emulation of the plots below, grew stonecrop and wallflowers. Vicarage it had none, for the clergyman lived at Barton; but it included two superior tenements—the one belonging to the doctor, which, although it did not establish its claim to being “a cottage of gentility” by reason of “a double coach-house,” possessed a single one in which stood the only vehicle of which Wallington could boast—the doctor’s gig; and the other Clover Cottage, inhabited by one Widow Gammer, who let the only lodgings in the place, and never lacked a summer tenant.

Down the winding village street, dividing it into

two nearly equal parts, ran Barton Brook, a swift but shallow stream, whose brightness and vigour gave promise of some full-fed river laden with many a barque, but which immaturely perished in the devouring sea. It was spanned by two rustic bridges—one a practicable one close to the bay; the other, like that one sees in the willow-pattern plate, was merely used for the foundations of a house, where Nature's productions, such as spar and shells, were sold, and which was considered by the designers of fancy note-paper one of the most picturesque objects in the county.

The church, strange to say, was not in the village, but stood half a mile away on the top of the Dane-cliff. It was a small Norman chapel, built probably as a thank-offering by some pious hand, rather than for the accommodation of a congregation; but the parson from Barton came over on Sunday afternoon and preached there to such as could find room, and the coastguard made it a point of honour to be married and have their children christened there, instead of in the mother church at Barton.

In a community so simple, and a spot so retired, without any local lawgiver, such as a squire or a rector, it was but natural that the great hotel should occupy a very prominent position in the eyes of the Wallingtonians. Its customers were their patrons, and encouraged Industry in the shape of prawn and lobster fishing, portorage for picnic purposes, and the hire of boats for conveyance to marine objects of interest; Commerce in the person of Mr. Mudge, the "universal provider" of the place, who sold everything that could be got for sixpence, from a stay-lace to a box of horse

soldiers; and Literature (in the fossil form) in the circulating library of the place, in which were to be found the novels of Mrs. Radcliffe, Miss Jane Porter, and even odd volumes of so recent an author as Sir Walter Scott.

Mrs. Trant, the landlady of the *Ultramarine*, was therefore, next to Queen Victoria, looked up to as the head of the State. In winter she reigned supreme, though in an empty palace; but in summer she herself was the subject of her customers, whose wish was law—except that it couldn't so much as get an oyster opened on a Sunday—to the little community. From May to November, in fact, the form of government at Wallington Bay was an oligarchy, composed of the visitors to the *Ultramarine*, the prominence of each individual of which depended on his length of purse or strength of will.

This body, always a numerous one, was at present dominated over by Mrs. Armytage, an elderly lady, but, except to her waiting-maid, of youthful appearance. She had a carriage and pair, a pug dog called Fido, a pet canary of her own, and a husband who was devoted to science. Next to her in weight and influence—but with this difference, that No. 2 possessed merely the dead weight of wealth, and had not the administrative capacities of the former lady—was Mrs. Jennynge, who had also a carriage and pair of her own, and a daughter by her second husband, a recently deceased dry-salter of renown. There was one other person whose length of stay at the *Ultramarine* seemed to give him a claim to make up the triumvirate—Mr. Thomas Aird, a retired Indian official, who, with his little son, aged seven, had resided at

the hotel since the spring. Besides these, there were several others with whom we shall make acquaintance in the course of this story; but those I have mentioned were the governing body. The rest seldom ventured, in Mrs. Armytage's presence, to express an opinion; or if they did, as Mr. Aird simply but forcibly expressed it, "they had their noses snapped off pretty sharp."

The social government of the place was, in short, a privy council composed of all the hotel guests, but only the prime minister and one or two other politicians (who secretly caballed against her, and were always in opposition) were allowed to have a voice in the direction of affairs. The *table-d'hôte* was a sort of Bed of Justice, over which, but in full dress, Mrs. Armytage presided, and laid down the law with a silver fork like Britannia with her trident. She always took the head of the table opposite the last comer (male), because she said the occupation of that position by a lady made the whole thing more like home. She forgot to add that it made it more like *her* home, with herself for its recognised mistress.

The dining-room was the old banqueting hall of the abbot's house, and terminated in a deep bay window in which Mrs. Armytage sat enthroned at the *table-d'hôte*, and by a turn of her head to either side could command an extensive view, which, moreover, comprised the approach to the hotel; and, without any reflection on that lady's taste for the picturesque, we may say that the arrivals and departures in connection with the *Ultramarine* interested her quite as much as landscape. The dinner hour was six—an unfashionably early time which had been fixed upon, in oppo-

sition to Mrs. Armytage's wishes, to suit Mr. Aird's little Davey, from whom he was inseparable, and who always sat at his left hand at meals. She was wont to say that it was enough to spoil *any* child (with a stress upon the "any" which implied that Davey was spoiled already) to be sitting up with grown-up people at such an hour. But little Davey was very popular, and his cause had been advocated by so large a majority of the cabinet that the prime minister had had to give way upon that point. Mrs. Jennynge was not, perhaps, a more ardent lover of children than herself, but she found this little peg very convenient to hang her opposition flag upon. Mr. and Mrs. Wallace, too—the homely old couple from Devonshire, whose existence at the council board Mrs. Armytage barely acknowledged—had for once raised their voices to the same effect; while Mr. Aird had bluntly said that if the dinner hour was made later he would rather dine with the child in his own private sitting-room, and sacrifice the charms of Mrs. Armytage's society altogether.

Upon the afternoon on which our story opens the hotel company were seated as usual at the festive board, each, or each set, with their characteristic drinks before them. Mr. and Mrs. Armytage had their bottle of champagne, of which the latter, it was rather ill-naturedly said, got the lion's share; whereas, as the lady had explained again and again, she had been recommended "constant support," and only took it in that effervescent form by the doctor's orders; while her husband, the Professor, had been limited by the same authority to two or three glasses at most, on account of the morbid activity of his brain. With the

exception of his brain, however, that gentleman was somewhat inert, his only exercise (he was an entomologist) being butterfly-catching, or rather the pursuit of that attractive insect, which he followed with a little green gauze net with greater perseverance than success. Mrs. and Miss Jennynge had a modest pint of Sauterne between them—all, as the former had once remarked, they ever took in the way of stimulant, of which, in her opinion (with a side glance at the champagne bottle) a lady could hardly take too little. We say *once* remarked, because Mrs. Armytage's rejoinder, "You are not afraid of *your* brain, Mrs. Jennynge, surely," was so very prompt and curt that it was not likely that the observation would be repeated.

Mr. and Mrs. Wallace drank cider; some said because it looked like champagne and might deceive the public, but in reality because they were used to it at home. Their two next neighbours were Mr. Felspar, the landscape painter, and his friend, Mr. Vernon, both lodging at Mrs. Gammer's in the village, and only occasional guests at the *table-d'hôte*. The artist was a man of thirty; but he looked younger than his years, from the circumstance of his having a delicate complexion and wearing neither beard nor whisker. This deficiency, however, was fully compensated for by the hair of his head, which, though worn long and in profusion, had always the appearance of being blown back by the wind, and caused him, combined with his eager eyes and fair complexion, to resemble a good angel on a gargoyle. His companion was some years his junior, and, if not so angelic, better looking. His features were delicate and of olive hue, with which the bright black moustache

upon his lip contrasted very becomingly. These two young gentlemen had some ordinary claret before them, for which Mrs. Trant knew better than to charge them any extraordinary price. Mr. Aird had a bottle of Madeira, though it was a wine that was understood to be much at variance with his already debilitated liver; while little Davey had a pint all to himself of what he firmly believed to be a rare and ancient vintage, but which in reality consisted of currant wine and water. He sipped it like a connoisseur, with his little golden head on one side, and one blue eye closed like a blonde raven, exactly as he had seen his father do. His napkin tucked under his chin to save his summer raiment from stain gave him the air of a gourmand, though he had the good sense (acting upon instructions beforehand, and not submitting, it was to be understood, to dictation before folks) to reject such dishes as were unwholesome. He had once admitted in a moment of confidence that he "loved his little stomach" (by which he intended, upon the principle, perhaps, that the greater includes the less, to indicate the things which he put into it); but, for all his grown-up ways and manners, he was essentially childlike. Upon the present occasion, for example, on the sound of wheel and hoof being heard without, the pleasures of the table sank into insignificance with him. The modicum of fish he was about to convey to his mouth was replaced quickly upon his plate, and in a moment he had stepped quietly down from his high chair, and, drawn by an irrepressible curiosity, had taken his station in the bay window.

"If I had a boy like that," observed Mrs. Armytage, with serene severity, "I'd——"

"You never will," put in Mr. Aird, with confidence.

"Never will what, sir?" inquired the lady, with indignation, and a look of appeal towards her husband.

But the Professor, never moved to wrath unless his theory of the *Lepidoptera* was questioned, and deep in the dissection of a whiting, never so much as raised his head.

"I only meant," explained Mr. Aird, repenting of his burst of temper, which in the case of any affront offered to his offspring he could never restrain, "I only meant that there never could be another child like Davey."

"One would hope not, if he is to behave like that," retorted the lady; "though it is not to be expected, when children of seven years old are allowed to dine late with their seniors, that anything like discipline——"

"There are *four* horses," cried little Davey from the window, from which he was prospecting down the road, like another Sister Anne, in total unconsciousness of being a *casus belli*; "a carriage and four, papa; pray come and look!"

"*Four* horses!" exclaimed Mrs. Armytage, in the excitement of the moment forgetting her own canons of etiquette, and rising from her chair to better reconnoitre the approaching vehicle.

"*Four* horses!" murmured Mrs. Wallace, from her side of the table, from which a view was to be obtained. "I don't know that I ever saw a carriage and four horses in my life."

"Did you never see a coach, lass?" inquired her husband; and pursued his repast with philosophic calm.

"*Four* horses!" murmured Mrs. Jennynge. "Who can it be? What do you think, Professor?"

"I, madam?" returned that gentleman, withdrawing his mind from scientific reflection and the whiting to grasp the problem thus unexpectedly presented to his notice. "If it is anything with four horses, it is most probably a hearse."

"Is it not extraordinary," whispered Vernon to Felspar, "how two extra post-horses can thus interest the female mind?"

"It is not *that*," returned his friend; "for if there were eight horses instead of four, it would proclaim a travelling caravan, which would not interest them at all. It is the suggestion of wealth conveyed in the number four (in harness) which makes it as significant as the number seven in magic."

"Small things agitate small minds," observed Vernon, didactically.

"Oh, papa! Oh, Mr. Vernon!" exclaimed little Davey, "there is such a bootiful young lady in the carriage!"

The Professor wiped his mouth and turned round in his chair, while Vernon hurriedly left his seat and joined the child in the bay window, no doubt with the intention of administering admonition and reproof. "My dear Davey," he said, "it is very wrong to stare at strangers;" but at the same time he glanced at the new arrival on his own account.

He had seen a good many pretty faces in his time, both in real life and in his friend Felspar's portfolio, who had a talent for drawing them; but neither nature nor art had hitherto shown him one so fair as that which was now presented to him. His glance became

permanent; in spite of himself he could not withdraw his eyes.

"It appears to me, Mr. Vernon," said Mrs. Armytage, severely, "that you are falling into the same error for which you have just reproved that child. Your profession"—and being that of letters, she entertained for it a very proper contempt—"gives you a great choice of epithets, which, I am told, you are not slow to apply to others. What would you call *me* if I was to stand and stare at every new comer like that?"

"Beautiful!" murmured the unconscious Vernon. "Most beautiful, and modesty itself."

CHAPTER III.

THE LADIES' DRAWING-ROOM.

WHO has not experienced, after a brief sojourn, it may be of a few weeks or even days, in a strange scene and among new people, a certain sense of the division of existence; a feeling that one's life has been distributed into two parts, one of which, lasting for it may be about half a century, we have got married in, begotten children, made our fortune or lost it, and in short played the usual parts in the human life drama; while the other half we seem to have spent at Muddleton-on-Sea, where we arrived a fortnight ago or so and are still resident! The Present is so real and actual when contrasted with the Past, its impressions are so much more vivid than the strongest efforts of memory, that time and events count almost for nothing in the comparison. And though a

day will come, perhaps, when Muddleton itself will be so utterly effaced from our recollection that we may doubt whether it was we ourselves who visited it, or a friend who described it to us, for the nonce it reigns supreme, and we are Muddletonians.

And thus it was with the guests at the *Ultramarine* at Wallington Bay. The hotel, where they had all been staying for some time, with an intention to prolong their visit, had become a second home to them, and, for the nonce, Wallington was their world. The events that occurred in it were insignificant enough, but circumstances had invested them with importance. What these good people did was little; but, since it was all they had to do, it monopolised their attention. Limited as was the sphere of their existence, there was room in it for intrigues, jealousies, and all human passions. A bijou theatre suffices as well as a San Carlo for the representation of the drama of life. The *table-d'hôte* alone displayed a multiplicity of phases of character; here every one met on common ground, and, though one had the supremacy, her sway, as we have seen, was not undisputed. Rebellion reared its impious head in the form of Mr. Aird, and insubordination showed itself, though less audaciously, in that of Mr. Vernon.

In the ladies' drawing-room, on the other hand, to which the fair sex generally repaired after the chief meal of the day, Mrs. Armytage reigned supreme; the impatience of authority occasionally manifested by Mrs. and Miss Jennynge was there subdued by terror. On the day on which our story opens, however, there was no room for antagonism in the minds of the occupants of this apartment; they were occupied, to

the exclusion of all lower passions, by the enthralling topic of the new arrivals. It is true that, for the moment, the master spirit was absent, as, on the conclusion of the *table-d'hôte*, Mrs. Armytage had gone straight to Mrs. Trant's parlour in order to glean from her all the particulars of which she might be possessed concerning the occupants of the barouche and four. Mrs. and Miss Jennynge, Mrs. Wallace, and some other ladies, including Mrs. Percival-Lott—an attractive-looking young person, suspected of being a bride, but who rarely opened her lips except to her husband, and even then apparently only to show her teeth—were awaiting her return with eager curiosity. The arm-chair which Mrs. Armytage usually occupied was vacant; it was beyond Mrs. Jennynge's courage to take possession of it, but in the interregnum she had assumed the airs of sovereignty, and was dispensing patronage.

"From my position at the *table-d'hôte*," she said, "I was unable to catch sight of these strangers; nor did I think it *comme il faut*" (Mrs. Jennynge had a great command of French phrases, though in her daughter's presence she was a little shy of exhibiting that gift; she would look at her, after indulging in them, with rather an apprehensive air in case anything might have gone wrong with her accent or their application)—"I say I did not think it *en règle* to turn round in my chair, and stare as one of us did who shall be nameless; but you, Mrs. Wallace, were on the other side of the table and could command a view of them. Do tell us honestly what they were like."

To do Mrs. Wallace justice, the adjuration was scarcely necessary; if she could not have told her

story honestly, it is certain she could not have told it at all. She had not the faculty of "making the thing that is not as the thing that is;" and, moreover, being old-fashioned, and having been brought up in the country, would have thought it wrong to do so. She was a farmer's daughter and a farmer's wife, and had come from her Devon home to Wallington Bay to recover from the effects of a domestic calamity. She never intended to offer opposition to anybody, but, through simplicity, she very often did it.

"Well, ma'am, I had only a glimmer of them from where I sat myself," she replied; "but the gentleman looked a real gentleman, though sickly, and his daughter—for I am sure they are father and daughter—seemed a very sweet creature."

"Any style?" inquired Miss Jennynge, languidly. She was a tall wasp of a girl, with dark hair worn *à l'Impératrice* sufficient for ten girls; her gown was so tight at the knees that you expected them to come through, and a little train jerked behind her as she walked, as though an invisible dog was hanging on to her ankle.

"Style!" echoed Mrs. Wallace, simply; the word recalled for a moment "the simple stile from mead to mead" about her Devon home; the next instant she would have understood readily enough what was meant, but, unfortunately, the requisite time was not allowed her.

"My daughter means was the girl *chic-chic*," observed Mrs. Jennynge, condescending to explain, but with some impatience of manner.

Poor Mrs. Wallace was more puzzled than ever;

she had got out of the fields only to find herself in a poultry yard.

"Oh, yes; she was quite young," observed the good lady, confidently.

"I can answer your question, Miss Jennynge," interposed the suspected bride. "I could see enough of the young lady to remark that she was far from distinguished looking; indeed, some people would call her dowdy."

"Your husband told me he thought her pretty," observed Miss Jennynge, maliciously.

Here Mrs. Percival-Lott began to show her teeth to some purpose, and would probably have "said things" had not Mrs. Armytage entered at that moment, bearing in her arms—instead of her pug dog, as usual—an enormous book.

"Oh, my dears!" she exclaimed excitedly, "what *do* you think?"

That Mrs. Armytage should have described the company as "my dears" was inexplicable; but there are moments in human life when the barriers of social prejudice are broken down, and the heart claims the right to speak. "I have found it all out! Here is his name in black and white;" and she touched the volume she had just placed on the table with impressive reverence. "The name of the gentleman is Josceline, and he is an Honourable."

"You don't say so!" ejaculated Mrs. Jennynge.

"Well, I never!" cried Mrs. Wallace, not intending to convey a vulgar astonishment, but only the simple fact that she had never happened to have seen an Honourable before.

"Mrs. Armytage regarded her for a moment with withering scorn, and then opened the sacred volume.

"This," she said, "is the Peerage. It is an old edition; but that is of small consequence, as one does not care for late creations."

"Of course not," said Mrs. Jennynge with magnificent contempt, as though she was speaking of early dinners.

"The word Josceline," resumed Mrs. Armytage, who only needed a glass of water to complete her resemblance to a public lecturer, "appears more than once in these pages; but the point of difference is the *s*. The Roden family, for example, spell their name with a *c* only." This information was hailed with quite a burst of satisfaction from all the ladies, including even Mrs. Wallace; she did not quite comprehend what the lecture was about, but she thought it must be very convenient to any family to spell their name with a single letter.

"The gentleman of whom we are speaking—and who is now staying at this hotel—is a cadet of the house of Boroughby; the title of the eldest son is Lord St. Stephens."

She paused to allow these mighty names to have their full significance, and also to mark their effect. She enjoyed the supremacy of the situation exceedingly, and, to use a very inappropriate (because common) expression, smacked her lips over it.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Mrs. Jennynge, settling the strings of her lace cap with nervous fingers; "pray go on."

"Here is the record," continued Mrs. Armytage, alluding to the volume with the same solemnity that

a Jewish Rabbi might treat the tables of the law. "Boroughby, Earl of; George—evidently a family name, as you will see—George Francis Camperdown, Earl of Boroughby, Viscount St. Stephens; also Baron Pollem, in the peerage of Ireland; Lord Lieutenant of Loamshire; commandant of Loamshire Yeomanry. Married Lady Theresa Augusta Fitzmarmalade, daughter of the Earl of Jellybag, K.P., and has issue"—concluded Mrs. Armytage triumphantly, as though, in the case of a couple so distinguished, such an event was almost more than could be looked for—"Catherine Dorothea, Charles Frederick Viscount St. Stephens, Henrietta Maria Georgina, and—here we have him—George Emilius Josceline; he was forty-nine last September."

"Dearie me!" exclaimed Mrs. Wallace with unfeigned astonishment; "how in the world did you find that out?"

"If you had ever *seen* a Peerage," returned Mrs. Armytage, pitifully, like a shocked missionary addressing the heathen, "you would know that the date of birth of every member of the aristocracy is inscribed in its pages."

"That must be rather hard upon the ladies," observed Mrs. Wallace, who, though impervious to satire, had a touch of simple drollery about her. Unhappily, in looking round for approbation of this stroke of humour, her eye fell upon Miss Jennynge. That that young lady would have liked to have had her name in the Peerage was certain, yet that revelation as to age would in her case have been a serious drawback. She was standing not on the brink of the rivulet "where womanhood and childhood meet," but

much lower down the river, and she took poor Mrs. Wallace's observation as a personal one.

"All jokes are vulgar," she observed; "but especially jokes upon a serious subject."

"La, Miss Jennynge, the Peerage ain't the Bible!" pleaded Mrs. Wallace. The other ladies pursed their lips and shook their heads; in principle they felt they were right, though in this particular case their antagonist might have the advantage of them.

"I am afraid you are a special pleader," sighed Mrs. Armytage; and all the other ladies sighed in sympathy like Æolian harps. "The question is," she resumed with the air of one who dismisses trifles for an important subject, "shall we have Mr. and Miss Josceline at the *table-d'hôte*?"

"Why, dear me, how could we keep 'em out of it?" exclaimed Mrs. Wallace.

"Keep them out!" echoed Mrs. Armytage, elevating her jewelled fingers; "what extraordinary observations, Mrs. Wallace, you are making this evening! Who would dream—unless to be sure," she added, significantly, "one was an atheist or a democrat—of keeping them out? What I meant to inquire was whether they would join the general table."

"To-night at all events, since the young lady will be tired," remarked Mrs. Jennynge, "she is almost sure to have a *dîner à part*."

"That, I think, may be taken for granted," observed Mrs. Wallace. "She is sure to dine with her Pa at all events."

Miss Jennynge laughed and threw her head up—it was one of those few portions of her frame which

her mode of dress left at her own disposal—in impatience and disdain, like a high-mettled horse.

“What have I said now,” thought poor Mrs. Wallace, “to make that girl so angry? My belief is that the strain upon her knees affects her temper.”

“I think,” said Mrs. Armytage, thoughtfully, “that it would be only civil—and—polite—especially as the young lady has no female companion—if one of us, as the representative of the rest, should leave her card upon the new arrivals. They have taken number fourteen sitting-room on the first floor.”

“By all means let us leave our cards,” said Mrs. Jennynge, eagerly; “it would be only as you say—I don’t mean *à propos*; what is the word, Julia?”

Julia shrugged her shoulders, and in so doing escaped so completely from her clothes that it was fortunate no gentleman, as sometimes happened, chanced to have joined the drawing-room party.

“I’m sure I don’t know what you mean, Mrs. Jennynge,” rejoined Mrs. Armytage, sharply. “The idea of our all leaving our cards! Why, it would be like a round robin, which is only used when one wants to complain of something. My proposal was that one of us should act as the representative of the rest.”

If the Earl of Boroughby had addressed his tenants in the same words, with Lord St. Stephens on his right hand as a candidate for a seat in Parliament, it could not have been more obvious to whom he referred than that on the present occasion Mrs. Armytage was referring to herself; nor was the result more doubtful. But, though defeated, Mrs. Jennynge had a kick in her yet. “In that case,” she observed, “I think we had better select the oldest of us.”

"I beg you won't," observed Mrs. Wallace, with a pretence of apprehension; "for, though Mrs. Armytage may run me very near, I believe as to years that I have the advantage of her."

As Mrs. Wallace openly proclaimed herself to be sixty, and playfully likened herself to a withered apple (which, indeed, she greatly resembled), the humility of this speech did not go far to make it palatable to the person to whom it referred.

"As the lady who has been longest *in the house*," answered Mrs. Armytage, emphatically, with a glance of scorn at Mrs. Jennynge, "and waiving any other claim such as might be derived from social position or otherwise, I accept the task which has thus un-animously been entrusted to me. I will call upon the Honourable George Emilius Josceline and his daughter to-morrow afternoon."

CHAPTER IV.

A VISITOR.

THE attendance at the public breakfast table next morning at the *Ultramarine* was more punctual than usual. Every one was on the *qui vive*, as Mrs. Jennynge expressed it, to see the new-comers, the tidings of whose rank and importance had spread far and wide. Whenever the door opened everyone looked up with expectation, except the suspected bride and bridegroom. Mr. Percival-Lott kept his eyes fixed on his plate, and Mrs. Percival-Lott kept her eyes riveted on him. When all were seated, and the next arrival was bound to be the expected pair, quite a murmur

of discontent went round the table when, instead of them, Mr. Walter Vernon presented himself.

"And to what are we indebted for *your* presence this morning?" inquired Mrs. Armytage, with a bitterness which, for once, the company thought not uncalled for.

"I am come, madam," said Vernon—with a hasty glance around him, which, curiously enough, reflected the general disappointment—"for breakfast. Felspar has gone out to paint some 'early effects,' and, being averse to a solitary meal, I have ventured to intrude my presence upon you."

"Very prettily expressed, I am sure," growled Mr. Aird, who was always cynical and cantankerous until midday, and sometimes later.

"Come and sit by me, Mr. Vernon," cried little Davey, "and then you can see the pretty lady;" and he pointed with his small finger to the two vacant chairs on the opposite side of the table.

Mr. Vernon had been at a public school and at college, and had also moved in good society, but he blushed to the roots of his hair, and took his seat without a word.

"By Jingo!" murmured Mr. Percival-Lott, just preserving himself from bursting into a roar of laughter by an application of muffin.

"I see nothing to laugh at in the child's remark," answered his youthful spouse, severely; "his forwardness is simply disgusting."

"Very much so; I deplore it," answered her husband, hurriedly. He was a blonde gentleman with a fluffy moustache, and with that sort of complexion which exhibits on the least provocation the innermost

emotions of the soul. He felt all the delight which a young man naturally experiences at the discomfiture of a contemporary of his own sex, and was not, perhaps, displeased that his views of the charms of Miss Josceline (which had been much depreciated by Mrs. Lott) should be thus corroborated by an independent opinion.

"What an *enfant terrible* that is!" whispered Mrs. Jennynge to her neighbour, Mrs. Wallace, "and also what an *enfant gâté*."

"He is all that, no doubt, ma'am," answered that lady, admiringly. "I always prefer children's talk to that of grown-up people, because it is so truthful. What a funny little trot he is!"

As the meal went on without sign of the new comers, Mrs. Armytage beckoned to one of the neat-handed Phyllises who, at the *Ultramarine*, performed to admiration the duties discharged elsewhere by greasy waiters, and asked her some question in a whisper. At the reply she raised her eyebrows and her eye-glasses, and thus addressed the company:—

"You will be sorry to hear, ladies and gentlemen, that there will be no addition to our party this morning, and still more for the cause. The Honourable Mr. Josceline is indisposed."

"Nothing catching, I hope?" inquired Mr. Aird, with an anxious look at the child beside him.

"Catching!" echoed Mrs. Armytage, contemptuously, as though, in connection with a person so distinguished, such a supposition could only have occurred to a very vulgar nature. "Esther tells me that she heard a word dropped about palpitations. There is always

something interesting to my mind in any matter connected with the heart."

"Yes, yes; an *affaire de cœur*," assented Mrs. Jennynge; "all sorts of charming things have been written about it."

"Lots of things have been written about the liver, too," grumbled Mr. Aird, with the air of one who had read them; "and none of them worth twopence."

"Well; whatever we may have thought of the matter last night," observed Mrs. Armytage, rising from the breakfast table, "it is now quite certain that my call upon Miss Josceline is indispensable. As ladies and Christians, since her noble father is prostrated on a bed of sickness, we cannot do less than offer her our condolences."

"One moment," pleaded Mr. Aird; and Mrs. Armytage, having sailed down the *salle-à-manger* in her stately fashion, delayed for one moment at the threshold. "If it's palpitations, you may take my word for it there is nothing like peppermint drops—you can get them at Mudge's emporium for threepence an ounce."

If Mrs. Armytage had had the patience, she would have learned from her informant how to obtain them even cheaper by purchasing a quantity, but she flounced out of the room in a huff. As respected Mr. Josceline, she was secretly not displeased that he should be afflicted with a slight indisposition; it would tend, as she imagined, to throw him and his daughter into her own hands, and to isolate him from the rest of the hotel company. On the other hand, she hoped he would not be ill enough to cause Dr. Cooper to be sent for—a person altogether unworthy of such pa-

tronage, and who, when consulted as a friend about her Fido's illness—when it seemed that the little darling was about to be taken from her—had thus delivered his professional opinion: "The brute is overfed, ma'am; as to his looking black under the eyes, pugs generally do; make him walk, and dock his vittles."

It was her duty now to prepare Fido's breakfast—a simple farinaceous meal composed of biscuits, cream, and sugar—and then to hold a medical consultation with her maid respecting Philomel, her pet canary, one of whose feathers had been discovered at the bottom of his cage.

"If the sweet creature is not moulting, Jane, what can be the alternative?" was her agonised inquiry.

"Perhaps, ma'am," replied the maid, at her wits' end, "the cat have got at it"—a suggestion that increased the apprehension of her mistress twenty-fold.

It is in such cases as these that natures given up to frivolity and idleness succumb to their fears and their regrets. That of Mrs. Armytage, however, was supported by a strong sense of social duty; and knowing that there were but a few hours before her, including the period allotted to lunch, she at once began to occupy herself in preparations in connection with her toilette, for the interview with the distinguished invalid.

When she said that the Joscelines had taken a first-floor apartment, she might have added, had she known it, that it was the best in the house; but it was a part of Mrs. Trant's calling, and one that helped to place her so deservedly high in it, to persuade every guest that he or she had secured the best sitting-

room in the hotel, whereas the best was, if possible, always kept vacant in case of some tremendous contingency, such as the sudden arrival of a person of great consequence, which had now occurred.

The apartment in question had three windows commanding a noble view of land and sea, and was furnished, though not expensively, in a much more liberal manner than is usual with hotel sitting-rooms. It had easy-chairs without a broken spring in the middle of them to suggest activity instead of ease; sofas from which the human body could be kept from sliding without continual support; and little tables that did not "tip" on touch as though they were under the patronage of spirits. On one of the tables was a vase of fresh flowers—an attention always paid by Mrs. Trant to new comers; and even a few books, including a county directory, some "Contributions to the History of the Danecliff" (a pamphlet by the Vicar of Barton), and an old volume of the "Mirror" for 1816.

Mr. Josceline, however, was independent of these literary attentions, since he never travelled without his own library, consisting of a pocket volume of Horace. He was reading it now, or rather dipping into it as one does dip into Horace, ever and anon looking out through the open window from his easy-chair, in reflection, I think, on some text from his favourite author, rather than entranced with the sights and sounds of nature. He was what Mrs. Jennynge would have termed *en déshabillé*: in a silk dressing-gown and with a little smoking cap which he in reality wore to conceal a slight baldness, and for which he found excuse in cigarettes. He was looking languid and pale, but less ill than bored. It was clear that

the charms of Wallington Bay had made very little impression on him; the expression of his face was apathetic, except when it was turned towards his daughter; then, if he caught her eye, he smiled; if otherwise, the apathy would give way to perplexity and occasionally to gloom.

Ella had been making cigarettes for him with a little machine she had brought from Paris; but, having completed as many as she thought he would require for the day, she had taken up some work of her own with which she was busying herself in silence. She had learnt never to be the first to commence conversation when alone with her father.

"What is that you are toiling at, Ella?" he inquired, presently; "it looks to me like a bonnet."

"My dear papa, I hope it will look like that to every one," she answered, cheerfully, "because it's meant for a bonnet."

"But I thought you bought a bonnet at Madame Cheris's?"

"So I did, papa; but a young lady does not wear a bonnet, as a man wears his hat, till it wears out."

"But I never made a hat in my life, Ella, and why should you make your own bonnets?"

"My dear papa, you don't understand the position. Nothing is so terrible, you must know, as for a girl to be seen every day in the same bonnet. This is one of the great things we look to, we women, in one another: 'Is that the same bonnet she wore yesterday, or last week, or last summer?' we say to ourselves; 'and is that a new dress, or is it turned or dyed?' Now, nobody but a millionaire could afford to get two bonnets at Madame Cheris's; so I buy one and

take it for a pattern; then, like Prometheus with his spark from heaven, I make a bonnet for myself."

It was evident that her father was amused by her gaiety, and even flattered by it, for, strange to say, it was inherited. There had been a time—alas, how long ago!—when he, too, had been light-hearted and witty. The wit remained in a certain crystallised form, and occasionally was even "happy;" but the gaiety of heart had departed.

"But, my dear Ella, suppose any one should come in and find my daughter making bonnets?"

"Then you, dear papa, would have to put your daughter on the sofa—for of course she would be in a dead faint—remove the pillow, and burn feathers under her nose till she comes to."

She spoke thus very playfully, but with a certain earnestness also, as though arguing against something unexpressed.

"And how much do you save by this operation in bonnets?" he inquired, gravely.

"Madame Cheris charges eight pounds; my materials cost me, perhaps, two, and my time is valueless. I save, therefore, six pounds. If I had a pencil I could make sure of it, but I think that is seventy-five per cent."

"Your facts are indisputable, Ella. Nevertheless, remember what I told you about the four posters. There is such a thing as false economy. For the future, when you have a bonnet to make, oblige me, at all events, by making it in your own room."

"I will take it up at once, dear papa," said Ella, cheerfully. "And I will bring down your medicine with me; it is time for you to take it."

Mr. Josceline glanced after her, as she left the room, with a yearning look which was, however, but momentary. "The girl is an angel," he muttered; "but, unhappily, one is not in heaven."

His eyes fell once more on his book, but this time he seemed to find no pleasure in its perusal. His brow contracted, and his thin white fingers also, and twice and again he struck his clenched hand against his knee. It was not of Horace he was thinking then, but of his own irrevocable past. There was a home spirit at his right hand, but he had no home to offer her—the time was over for that; but, for the moment, the reflection that it was so, spread gloom upon his soul. It so changed his face that Ella noticed it as she entered the room.

"Are you not feeling so well, papa? I do trust you will dine alone with me to-day, and not venture upon the excitement of the *table d'hôte*."

"Yes; if the people are like the place," he said, with his usual quiet cynicism, "it will, indeed, be a vortex of gaiety. Still, I shall risk it."

"Not to-day, papa," she pleaded; "you are more of an invalid, I fear, than you imagine."

He shook his head and murmured to himself, "There is, therefore, the less time to lose;" then added aloud, "It will do me good; change always does."

If it was so, Mr. Josceline ought to have been in very robust health; for he had been a rolling stone, which, if it had gathered no moss, had rolled on it. Leisure and ease had been his own for many a year; his only experience of want had been on one occasion (which he had never forgotten), when his champagne had been served for him in some place in the provinces

without ice, owing to the total absence of that commodity. The incident ranked in his mind with such examples of barbarism as are recorded of Patagonia, and in the tales of destitution that are narrated concerning shipwrecks. "If you will believe me," he would say with feeling, "there was not a pound of rough ice, far less of Wenham, in the whole town!"

He had never had any large command of money, but, with the exception of a small sum allotted to Ella's schooling and maintenance, he had scrupulously spent what he had upon his own pleasures; his income would have been amply sufficient for himself and her little needs, now that she was grown up, and had become his companion in their life's journey, but, unfortunately, it died with him. With this fact (for which he had himself to blame) his conscience reproached him not bitterly (for, as we have said, it was a very gentlemanly conscience), but perceptibly; it filled him with an anxiety he would not, perhaps, otherwise have experienced to get his daughter settled in life. His experience, manners, and even tastes, he estimated as so many investments in her favour. He had had to pay for them pretty handsomely; but, if they procured her a good position, she would have little, he persuaded himself, to complain of on the score of his having squandered the hard cash. Until he knew her—that is, until some six months ago—he had felt, from circumstances which will be explained hereafter, but little remorse; but he had learnt to love the girl as he had never loved any one before (always excepting George Emilius Josceline), and to feel, though without openly admitting them, the obligations of a parent.

As one who knows argument to be useless, Ella uttered a little sigh, and having administered the medicine to her father very carefully—for it was a most powerful drug—took out some drawing materials, and, seating herself at the window, began to sketch.

Mr. Josceline, still affecting to be deep in Horace, watched her furtively from under the hand he put up to screen himself from the sun; glare was obnoxious to him, as were all loud sounds and powerful odours; an organ in the street gave him acute pain, and if a wallflower chanced to be in the room with him, it turned him faint. Yet by nature he was by no means effeminate; as a young man he had been a bold rider and no despicable opponent with the gloves, and as a fencer he had had no rival at the university; but in the process of destroying his constitution he had developed “nerves.” The least thing unstrung him, and, but for his solicitude for his reputation for good manners, or, in other words, for a certain superfine calm, he would have become a prey to irritability.

“You have a set of very busy fingers, Ella,” he presently said. “Even to look at them puts me in a fidget.”

“Shall I read to you, dear papa? I am afraid I cannot manage Horace, but I’ll try.”

“No, thank you, my dear,” said the invalid, precipitately; “in my present state of health a false quantity would be worse than a double dose of that stuff,” pointing to the medicine with a gesture of disgust. “Why are you putting away your pencils?”

“I thought my drawing worried you; Dr. Dufaure said you were to be kept free from all annoyances.”

“That is, unhappily, a prescription that cannot

easily be made up," sighed Mr. Josceline. "Pray go on with your amusement. There can be no harm in it unless you flatter yourself it is work."

"Well, papa, it *is* work to me; that is to say, it is the one thing which, when I have done well, I feel satisfied with myself about."

"You think you are a great artist, do you?"

"Dear papa, oh no! On the contrary, I feel I am only on the threshold of art, not even across it. I only meant that when I have done a careful piece of drawing, it seems to me that I have not been idling away my time."

"How so? What's the good of it, more, I don't say than a tune on the piano, because the drawing remains and the sound vanishes, but more than a bit of lace-work, for example? Do you propose to make your living by it?" he added suddenly.

Ella crimsoned from brow to chin, but remained silent.

"Now, my dear child, pray do not give way to illusions. For a young lady of your condition and advantages to take up drawing as a profession is what mechanics call a waste of power. You might just as well take up clear-starching. I have not the slightest objection to your pursuing it as an amusement, mind, or even to your pursuing it with the aid of masters, but what I fear is that this occupation may lead your mind into a wrong direction, and perhaps yourself with it."

"I do not quite follow you, papa," said Ella, tremulously.

"You follow me quite sufficiently, my dear; you

are one of those to whom a hint is as significant as a sermon, and I never preach sermons, you know."

"No, indeed, papa," she interrupted with tender gravity; "I don't think you ever could."

Here a very curious circumstance happened, and one which to Ella (notwithstanding the compliment just paid to her intelligence) was wholly inexplicable. The blood rushed into her father's cheeks, and his eyes sought the ground with an unmistakable look of discomfort and annoyance; the instant afterwards he fixed them on her face with a look of sharp suspicion. They read nothing there but a surprised solicitude, and a desire to please him at all hazards, that was never absent from it.

"You are a good girl, and will, I know, obey my wishes," he said gently. "Let me see your drawing."

She put it into his hand with a smile that would have disarmed any critic of the male sex.

"It is very nicely done," he said; "but there are five hundred girls, in art schools and elsewhere, who could have done it better."

"I am quite sure of that, papa," she answered confidently.

"And not ten of them, my dear, will ever make a hundred pounds a year by such a calling. You have no idea," he added, smiling, "what a much prettier picture you make yourself."

She rose, and, with exquisite grace which yet contrived to include a touch of humour, made him an elaborate courtesy. There were many prettier girls in the world than Ella Josceline, but very few had such a charm of manner. This is well understood in society to be worth cultivation; but, unhappily, models are

scarce. Of the drawling girl, and the gushing girl, and the would-be meretricious or fast girl, we have many specimens; but the girl that ventures to be natural is seldom found. Ella had this rare courage, and, to those who could read nature it was irresistible.

It was possible that her father might have paid her another compliment, for he was very pleased, and also willing to improve the occasion; but at this moment there was a knock at the door, and Phœbe, the neat-handed, entered.

"If you please, Miss, Mrs. Armytage's compliments, and might she be permitted to make a call upon you?"

"Mrs. Armytage? I do not know the lady; there must be some mistake," said Ella.

"It is about a subscription for the Tonga Missionary Fund, or the Floating Church for Sailors," murmured Mr. Josceline. "Tell her I'm ill."

"Oh, sir, please sir, she knows *that!*" said Phœbe, overhearing the last word. "It is on that very account, she says, that she hopes you will see her. She thinks she has something that will do you good."

"That must be tracts," muttered the invalid. "Tell her, my good girl, that we will read anything she will be so good as to send us; but that I regret exceedingly that my health will not permit of a personal interview."

"La, bless ye, sir! it ain't reading; it's a linseed poultice or summut."

"Good heavens!" cried Mr. Josceline, "she must be mad. Who is she?"

"Well, sir, she's been here the longest in the house, and is a lady very much looked up to."

Ella was once more about to excuse herself on the ground of her father's indisposition, when, to her great surprise, he answered for himself:—

"Say, if the lady does not mind my being in invalid costume, we shall be happy to see her."

Whereupon, no sooner had the door closed, than, with a celerity that very distinctly conveyed the idea that she had been waiting in the passage, it was reopened by Mrs. Armytage herself.

She entered with a visiting card in her hand, which, after polite salutations made and received, she laid on the table by Mr. Josceline with the air of some highly trained and intelligent animal.

"In most cases," she said, "an apology should be made for such a volunteer visit; but I trust that the wife of Timothy Armytage will be acquitted of the charge of intrusion."

"She is certainly mad," murmured Mr. Josceline to himself; but what he observed aloud and very graciously was, "The name of Armytage, madam, is very familiar to me."

CHAPTER V.

THE MAP OF THE COUNTRY.

"I SHOULD in any case," said Mrs. Armytage, addressing herself in a low tone to Ella, "have done myself the honour of calling upon you, but the knowledge of your father's indisposition has somewhat precipitated matters. In the event of it being palpitations, and supposing he should have decided upon sending for Dr. Cooper—an excellent person, no

doubt, but hardly accustomed to delicate and—ahem!—highly-wrought organisations, I possess a sovereign remedy. I have not brought it with me,” she added, in answer to Ella’s look of amazement, but the cook is preparing it in a saucepan under my directions.—You have a fine look-out from your window, Mr. Josceline, however unfavourably an hotel apartment may contrast with those to which you have naturally been accustomed.”

“The hotel is an excellent one,” said Mr. Josceline, in the honeyed voice that was more pleasing to strangers than to those that knew him; it often concealed a contempt that suddenly showed itself in biting satire. “And if it were not so good,” he continued, “the company to be found in it, to judge by the present specimen”—he indicated Mrs. Armytage herself by a courteous bow—“would more than make up for material shortcomings.”

“You are very kind to say so,” returned his visitor, “but—if I may make the observation without vanity—perhaps I am scarcely an example of what is popularly called the ‘common run’ of visitors at the *Ultramarine*.”

“Heaven forbid, madam,” ejaculated Mr. Josceline, fervently, “that I should have imagined that for a single moment.”

“I am among them, but not of them,” resumed Mrs. Armytage, in further explanation. “My husband’s eminence in science——”

“Mr. Toby Armytage,” observed Mr. Josceline, referring, somewhat unsuccessfully, to the card at his elbow.

“Timothy, sir—Professor Timothy Armytage,” re-

turned the lady, with some stress upon the prefix; "a man of European reputation, and who has given his name to a whole division of the *genus scarabæides*—the beetle family."

Mr. Josceline, beginning to think that he had heard the name, though erroneously confusing it with some advertisement of a patent insect killer, murmured, "Of course."

"I say, possessing a husband so eminent, and tastes of my own which I hope elevate me above the common herd, I can hardly be expected to amalgamate with the society that chance collects within the walls of an hotel."

"But being an observer of human nature," said Mr. Josceline, smiling—for he was not only much amused, but saw his way to getting a *carte du pays*—"you know all about them doubtless. Now, my daughter and I being strangers here, I should be very thankful for information upon that point. I need not say whatever you tell us will be in the strictest confidence."

"Oh, they know what I think of them!" was the frank reply. "I am one of those who speak plain English. Not like Mrs. Jennynge, whose every other word is French, or what she believes to be such. That her name is Jennings, pure and simple, I have no more doubt than that that's a slipper."

Mr. Josceline modestly drew the foot to which allusion had thus been made, beneath his dressing-gown, and remarked gently, "Perhaps she changed it for money?"

"Not she," returned Mrs. Armytage, disdainfully. "She didn't get her money that way, bless you. Her

husband was something—well, I think, in the cotton line.”

“And the lady herself is a remnant?”

“Now, that’s capital!” said Mrs. Armytage, putting up her glasses and regarding her companion with undisguised approval; “I should not have thought that a person of your position—an Honourable and that—would have known what ‘a remnant’ was. Yes; she’s a widow, for the second time, and very rich.”

“May we add without incumbrance?” inquired Mr. Josceline, airily.

“We may not indeed, sir; she has a daughter—such a daughter!” and Mrs. Armytage threw up her hands in a manner which might have expressed anything except approbation. “Her name is Anastasia, I believe, but her mother calls her ‘Statty.’ Gaunt, angular, half dressed, and ill balanced.”

“As to her mind, you mean?”

“No; her heels. They are so high that she leans forward like the Tower of Pisa, and threatens to fall like that of Babel. And she has a tongue like it too.”

“Like her heels? How curious!”

“No, no; like Babel. She can talk, so her mother says, five languages; *tout accomplie* she calls it—meaning, very accomplished.”

“And has she been long accomplished? I mean is she still young, or a little what her mamma could call *passée*?”

“A good deal *passée*,” said Mrs. Armytage, confidently. “You’ll say so when you see her; and”—here she dropped her voice so that Ella shouldn’t hear her—“you’ll see a good deal of her. It’s shock-

ing, positively shocking, the way she dresses. 'Nothing'—as I once ventured to tell her mother—'nothing, my dear madam, but abject poverty can excuse your daughter going about with so little on her.' Drawings!" Here the visitor's eye lit upon Ella's sketch. "Oh, how beautiful, and how like! It is certainly one of those two headlands; is it not, Miss Josceline?"

"Yes," said Ella, amused by this very moderate compliment to her artistic skill; "it is the one with the coastguard station on it; but I have not had time to put that in yet."

"I see. Rome was not built in a day, was it? Indeed, you've only had the morning. Mr. Felspar must see this."

"Who is Mr. Felspar?" inquired Mr. Josceline.

"Oh, an artist! he lodges in the village, but sometimes comes to dine at the *table-d'hôte*. A very unassuming person indeed, and of considerable talent. He must take your daughter's portrait; he took mine."

"And was it like?" inquired Mr. Josceline, regarding the original with the most unmistakable interest and admiration.

"I think it is," said Mrs. Armytage, modestly casting down her eyes. "The Professor thinks there is something wanting in the expression—a lack of dignity and command."

"He would miss that if it wasn't there," observed Mr. Josceline, gravely.

"Yes; Mr. Felspar has failed to catch the characteristics. He should, as I tell him, confine himself entirely to portrait painting. As it is, he does landscapes also; 'a Jack of all trades,' as I ventured to

remind him, 'is master of none.' But his advice will doubtless be useful to you, Miss Ella—if I caught your name correctly, my dear," she added, turning to the young lady.

"My father calls me Ella," said the girl, significantly, and with the least tinge of a flush.

"Just so; it is a very pretty name, probably a family one. Is it not so?"

"No; it is not, madam!" returned Mr. Josceline, with a curtness that was almost ferocity. "None of my family have ever been so called before, even by their own relatives." His manner was at once frost and fire; and the sting of his last sentence would have been felt by most people like the lash of a dog-whip.

Mrs. Armytage, however, was even more mistress of herself than of other people. She would take no offence when not inclined to do so, even though you put it in her hand and doubled her fingers over it.

"Now, that's curious," she observed, quietly. "However, you may have plenty of Ellas among you yet; even the French Louises began somewhere. The names in families always interest me. Now, there's the Percival-Lotts—bride and bridegroom *we* think, but you will judge for yourself—nothing will ever persuade me that they have any right to that name."

"One has heard of Lott before, and also of Lott's wife," observed Mr. Josceline, indifferently. He had by this time recovered his equanimity, but the effects of the storm were still apparent.

"It is not the Lott, my dear sir, it is the Percival with the hyphen that I object to; he looks to me much more like a Peter."

"Permit me to remark, madam, that Peter has some claims to respectability—some persons would even say, to reverence."

"No doubt; but not to aristocracy—that's the point. She's as close as wax, and very cunning. But I shall find out all about them some day, including the Percival. They try to pass themselves off as an old married couple, but Mrs. Jennynge swears she heard her ask her husband at breakfast whether he took cream and sugar. That's conclusive, you know."

"True; unless, indeed, the gentleman's tastes were very changeable."

"Gentlemen's tastes don't change about those sort of things," observed Mrs. Armytage, with a drop in her voice and a significant contraction in her left eye; "we know better than that."

Mr. Josceline bowed in acknowledgment of the confidence thus reposed in him, and also because he could not trust himself to speak; the rapidity with which the lady made her advances tickled his very heartstrings.

"I saw a very nice-looking old couple in the garden this morning," observed Ella—perceiving the necessity of relieving her father's embarrassment, though ignorant of its cause—"of the name, as I understood, of Wallace."

"Oh, you mustn't know *them*!" returned Mrs. Armytage, hastily; "indeed, if you had not mentioned them, I should have ignored their existence. As the Professor would say, they don't move in the same plane with us at all."

"Dear me!" murmured Mr. Josceline; "that's very clever of them. Have they an orbit of their own, then?"

"I don't know about that," said Mrs. Armytage, doubtfully, and rather regretting that she had handled a scientific weapon even in the way of metaphor; "they have a farm in Devonshire. He is always speaking depreciatingly about the Wallington cows."

"That looks as if he wanted to buy them," observed Mr. Josceline.

"Perhaps; that is, I don't think so. They have come to recover themselves from a domestic loss."

"A cow?"

"No, no; a child. Of course they have a legal right to stay here, but it is very inconsiderate of them; they have not been accustomed to society, and have not the art to conceal it. Mr. Wallace told me that she had often churned butter with her own hands."

"That, again, was very clever of her," observed Mr. Josceline.

"Well, of course she used a machine; but the idea of a lady churning butter!"

"*I* have done it," said Ella, simply. "We had a dairy at our school at Clapham, and we thought it the greatest treat to be allowed to churn."

"Oh, at Clapham!" answered Mrs. Armytage, shaking her head; "that's quite another thing."

"And so I dare say was the butter," remarked Mr. Josceline.

"Just so," continued his visitor, approvingly. "A young lady may do a thing to amuse herself, such as this drawing for instance; but she would never think of getting any money for it, one hopes."

"A very just observation, madam," observed Mr. Josceline.

"I certainly never thought of getting any money for that drawing," said Ella, good-naturedly; "and I am afraid no one would ever think of giving it."

"Of course not," said Mrs. Armytage; "that would be too ridiculous. It is only a man like Mr. Aird who does not see that; he says the sole difference between the amateur and the professional is that the work of one is inferior to that of the other. He told me once that a country gentleman was only a glorified game-keeper; whereupon I ventured to remark that such opinions were revolutionary, and that he was an incendiary."

"And who is Mr. Aird?" inquired Mr. Josceline.

"An old Indian."

"Heavens? and, apparently, in his war paint."

"Nay; I mean a retired Indian civilian. He is said to have heaps and heaps of rupees."

"Indeed! Then I suppose he married a Begum."

"Very likely; in my opinion he would stick at nothing. He has got rid of her, however, somehow; he is a widower with but one child, and that's a spoilt one."

"Is he not very delicate?" inquired Ella. "I noticed a pretty but very fragile-looking boy looking out of the window of the dining-room when we arrived."

"That's him. Yes; he is fragile enough; no wonder when he dines with grown-up people, and has a bottle of wine all to himself."

"How shocking!" exclaimed Ella. "What sort of wine?"

"Oh! I don't know; it puts one out of patience even to look at him; though, of course, it is his father's fault."

"And how old is this terrible gentleman?" inquired Mr. Josceline, carelessly.

"Seven—though he might be seventy, from his old-fashioned ways."

"I meant his father."

"Oh, he?—well; I'm sure I don't know. He looks as brown and withered and (taking his manners into account) as rough as a what-do-you-call-'em?—things you have at dessert—a lychee."

"Lychees, however, are sweet inside," observed Ella.

"That's just what Mr. Vernon says: his notion is that ill health makes the man testy, but that he has a kind heart. But there, as I once ventured to tell him, 'Perhaps, Mr. Vernon, you want to get some of Mr. Aird's rupees; in which case you will be disappointed, since every single one of them will go to little Davey.'"

"That was very frank and like yourself," observed Mr. Josceline with gentle approval; "but who is Mr. Vernon?"

"Oh, no one to speak of; a friend of Mr. Felspar, who lodges in the same house with him; a man of good birth and breeding, but who has thrown all the chances of life away and himself with it. You have known such cases yourself, I dare say, Mr. Josceline."

"Yes;" the word was snapped out sullenly, like the closing of a spring lock. To the ears of his visitor the tone seemed only to express contempt, in sympathy with her own, for all such ne'er-do-wells; but Ella knew that the conversation had somehow become distasteful to her father. As usual, therefore, she instantly came to his relief.

"What is it this Mr. Vernon has done which is so dreadful?" she inquired pitifully. It was natural to her to feel pity for persons in misfortune, even when merited, rather than indignation and a desire for further penalties.

"Well, instead of entering a profession, like every other young man in his position, the poor creature took to writing—writing stories."

"But if he didn't write other people's names on cheques," said Ella, laughing, "which would be a very wicked sort of story, why should he not? There is no harm in it."

"My dear young lady, of course there is no harm in it," said Mrs. Armytage, gravely—that is, as an amusement; but, as I was just now remarking about painting (and had the happiness to find your father agreed with me), the calling of letters is not one to be undertaken seriously by—well, I don't say gentlemen, because I don't wish to be personal, and this young man (apart from his pursuit) is very presentable—by persons who have been born to better things. What do you say, Mr. Josceline?"

"My dear madam, it is unnecessary for me to say anything. You have expressed my own sentiments in the happiest manner. It must be conceded, however, that a man may do what he likes so long as he remains single. The evil is when a woman attempts to gain a position for herself by any other means save those which are in accordance with common usages and—and—the fitness of things. We shall have the pleasure of seeing you again at the *table-d'hôte*, I conclude?" for Mrs. Armytage had risen to go.

"Oh, certainly! Then I shall have the honour of

introducing you to the Professor! He is ranging the hills just now in pursuit of the painted lady—a butterfly,” she added in explanation, as Mr. Josceline slightly raised his eyebrows. “As for you, Miss Ella, with your papa’s permission, I shall henceforth take you under my wing.” And with a pleasant nod, that would have been somewhat familiar but that it was neutralised by a certain jutting and swan-like movement which characterised her on momentous occasions, Mrs. Armytage swam out of the room.

“A very remarkable woman,” observed Mr. Josceline when the door had closed behind her.

“But, my dear papa,” said Ella, hesitatingly, “she did not strike me as being—well—quite a lady.”

“She didn’t say she was, my dear, and we should never find fault where there is no pretence. I confined myself to saying she was remarkable; she is a woman of character, and has already been of the greatest use to us by giving us the *carte du pays*. You think it was wrong of me to suck her brains, and especially to lead her to believe she had made such a favourable impression on us? Yet she came here to suck ours, and to produce that very impression. Do you suppose she really came to give me a linseed poultice? You may take my word for it she has forgotten all about it, and in that case I am glad it *was* linseed, or we should, perhaps, have made acquaintance with it in the form of some ‘*entremet*’ at the *table-d’hôte*.”

CHAPTER VI.

A HAZARDOUS DESCENT.

It was soon made known to the guests at the *Ultramarine* that the Honourable George Emilius Josceline and his daughter would honour the *table-d'hôte* with their presence; but what was by no means so certain, and was debated among the great powers with considerable energy and bitterness, was, where were they to sit? From the very earliest ages this question has always been a supreme one, and very much to my content; for when I read of the eminent specimens of humanity who have made a point of this matter of precedence, and behold living ones concerning themselves about it, and reflect that I myself don't care one button where I sit, provided the chair is comfortable and not in a draught, I cannot but experience some sensation of superiority. To my mind, there are few things so curious as to see a lady arranging beforehand the position of her guests at the dinner-table, without the least regard to how A, as a neighbour, is likely to get on with B, but solely according to the great principles of *Debrett*: the effect of which is sometimes very curious.

"By Jove, sir," a great painter once confided to me, "if that wretched woman" (mentioning a hostess of considerable fashion) "did not send me down to dinner after a captain in a marching regiment, as though I had been a painter and glazier!"

These individual wrongs, as I told him, will sometimes be inflicted; but social order in the general must be maintained, or where are we? The person

who has the most right to complain, on such occasions, is the master of the house, who, with a list of couples as long as that of the greyhounds at a coursing meeting crumpled up in his hand, walks about his drawing-room before dinner like a man with something heavy on his mind, and separates the most sociable pairs. "You mustn't take that girl, Plantagenet," he whispers; "you must take Lady Dowdey." Then he shrinks into a corner, takes his list out again as though it were a writ he was about to serve upon his guests, and he very much ashamed of it, and extracts another sentence of separation.

In a private house, whatever perplexity and agony of mind are thus undergone by the master of it, the question of precedence is thus managed somehow, but at a *table-d'hôte* matters are different. "Seniority," as a rule, prevails over the "nomination system," and those who have been longest at the hotel take the highest place at the board. It is far from analogous to the theory of the survival of the fittest, since in the case of the *Ultramarine* it might actually have happened through death, or a more fashionable sort of "departure," that such persons as Mr. and Mrs. Wallace should have found themselves at the top of the mahogany tree. Indeed, that very argument was made use of, with her accustomed directness, by Mrs. Armytage, when maintaining against Mrs. Jennynge that the new arrivals should sit at her own right hand. "They have a claim to it," she urged, "by social position; whereas if you stick to the hotel regulations, they will have to sit below the Wallaces—a position obviously repulsive to one's sense of right."

But Mrs. Jennynge, who always shook when

agitated, objected like a very aspen leaf; she foresaw that with Mrs. Armytage on one side of them, and Mr. Felspar on the other, her daughter and herself would be cut off from all communication with the Joscelines—a position of affairs she was by no means inclined to accede to.

“You want to keep them all to yourself, Mrs. Armytage,” she said, with unwonted courage; “and we won’t submit to it. What is your opinion, Mrs. Lott?”

Mrs. Lott, whose place at dinner was at the lower end of the table, opined that the ordinary rules of the hotel should not be infringed.

“The rule of the hotel,” said Mrs. Armytage, boldly, “is that all personal friends, even though they may not have arrived at the same time, sit next to one another at dinner, and the Joscelines are *my* personal friends—that is, they have now become so.”

“By adoption?” inquired Miss Jennynge, stung to sarcasm.

“No, miss; by community of ideas, and—and by equality of social position; that is to say, though my husband’s name may not be actually in the Peerage, his pre-eminence in the scientific world—— I beg your pardon, Miss Jennynge; I did not catch your exceedingly courteous interruption.”

“I said ‘Rubbish,’” observed that young lady, calmly; and indeed Mrs. Armytage was very well aware that she had done so.

Then an idea entered that great woman’s mind which could only have occurred to one with a genius for administration; she resolved, as other great rulers of mankind—such as emperors and kings—have done

before her when oppressed by circumstances, namely, to remove the seat of government altogether.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," she said, with an air befitting the momentous character of her resolve; "I shall migrate to the bottom of the table, and sit with them *there*."

"A very good plan," observed Mrs. Lott, who would thus be brought into close proximity with the desired objects, "and one which will content all parties."

"If you go there you shall stop there!" cried Miss Jennynge, vehemently. "Mamma, remember you will henceforth take the head of the table."

This terrible threat was not without its effect upon Mrs. Armytage.

Pope Clement and his successors who removed from the Eternal City to Avignon, it will be remembered, did not stay very long there, and were glad enough to get back to Rome. And, supposing they had found the Vatican occupied by somebody else!

"Very good," said Mrs. Armytage, in a tone of quiet resignation; "then let matters run their own course."

From this, one would have imagined that she would have taken no further action in the affair; but she was not one of those diplomatists who advocate a masterly inaction, and let things slide. She put on her outdoor things, and sallied forth in the direction taken by the Professor. A husband's ear is doubtless the most fitting one in which a wife can confide her troubles; but then he must not have a bee (or a butterfly) in his bonnet. The erudition of Timothy Armytage, F.R.S. and V.P.R.S., had so absorbed, not to say corrupted, his brain, that he could no more understand the delicacies of a question of precedence than a schoolboy.

After pursuing the cliff-path for a few hundred yards, she diverged into a quiet cove, where she knew Mr. Aird and Davey were usually to be found at that period of the afternoon. The descent was not easy for a lady of her build and stature; nor could little Davey have accomplished it but for the help of his father's hand, which never unclasped its hold till they reached the shore. They came hither for Davey's lessons in geography, history, and spelling, which were carried on in a singular manner. By no means from want of wits, but of opportunity, and from chronic ill-health, the child was backward in his studies; which were pursued in summer time not in the ordinary fashion, with books and slates, at all, but in the open air. Mr. Aird drew maps, and figures, and words upon the silver sand with his walking-stick, and gave his lectures *sub Jove*, like a philosopher of old. Here the parallel would have ended—for the old Indian was by no means a philosopher as to patience and temper—had not paternal love stepped in, and, out of very unpromising material, fashioned a most tender teacher. Davey, too, had his little stick, with which he journeyed over the four quarters of the globe—delaying most in Asia, where jungles and tigers do most abound, whereof his father had much to tell him; totted up vast sums in pounds, shillings, and pence; and cultivated literature. It was a pretty sight (save for those who can only recognise that beauty which is but skin deep) to see the sun-browned and withered man imparting to the child of his old age these rudiments of knowledge. The affection in the teacher's face was well understood by the pupil, but a certain grave anxiety that also lurked there was unintelligible to him. There were

other reasons for that look of pain; but what was secretly gnawing at his father's heart was the presentiment that these immature fruits of the tree of knowledge were doomed never to ripen; that the boy himself had the seeds of early death in him. It was not solely because he was his only child that little Davey was his father's idol, but because he had a foreboding that he would at no distant date have only the memory of him to enshrine. It was the opinion of a great doctor he had consulted that his son had remained in India a year too long; a verdict bitterer than wormwood to him, since he himself had retained him there, partly because the lonely man could not bear to part with him, and partly because, in just twelve months, a large pension would become due, after which he could return home and dwell there. The home, however, was England and not Scotland, the climate of which was too severe for Davey.

On the afternoon in question, the pair, after going through their educational curriculum, had travelled together to the father's birthplace (a village which occupied, on their map, by the bye, a much larger space than that allotted to it by hydrographers), and were putting the usual finishing touch to their labours, which consisted in the formation of the word "Edith" upon the sands by Mr. Aird, and the copying of it by the child—a sacred conclusion to the lessons for the day, for it was his dead mother's name. As Mr. Aird stood regarding the rough letters which the tide was presently to erase, but which were engraved on his own innermost heart as on a tombstone beneath which she lay, his attention was arrested by a smothered voice from the cliff above.

"Mr. Aird, Mr. Aird, my head is going round! I want you to help me down!"

He looked up and beheld what he judged, by the voice, to be Mrs. Armytage; her face was averted from him, and kept close to the cliff, down which she had been proceeding backwards, and on all fours, until fear and giddiness had checked her progress.

"Confound the woman, what does she want here?" he muttered.

"I'm going, I'm falling!" continued the lady, in piteous accents. "I shall be dashed to pieces; help, help!"

In spite of this urgent appeal, to which little Davey also added his entreaties ("She'll roll down, papa, and come flop"), he quietly drew the sand over his wife's name with his stick before proceeding to her rescue. He was a kind-hearted man at bottom, but he had a sense of proportion, and rather than leave that sacred name for such a daw as Mrs. Armytage to peck at, he would have seen her roll twice the distance, which, indeed, was not very considerable.

At present, however, she resembled not so much a daw as those birds of prey which, having been shot by the keeper, are nailed to the door of his master's barn; or rather, perhaps, from her majestic size, the spread eagle of Prussia. Only those whose heads are apt to "go" or "turn round" when confronted with precipices, can fully appreciate her position. When she heard Mr. Aird scrambling slowly up towards her she uttered an ejaculation of thankfulness. "I should have been gone," she said, "in another moment. Pray don't leave me."

"But, my dear madam, I can't stay here all day upon all fours. You must make an effort."

"I tell you I can't; I scarcely dare to breathe—good gracious!"

Here a large stone, upon which one of her feet rested, gave way, and nearly carried away her would-be deliverer in its descent. The removal of this support made the poor lady's position to the last degree precarious. She would have said her prayers, but such was her agony of mind that she could not recall them to her recollection.

"Take hold of me," she murmured piteously, "take hold of me."

"My dear madam," replied Mr. Aird—whose countenance, I am afraid, indicated much more amusement than anxiety—"if I do so, it must be by the leg."

"By all means," said the lady, eagerly—she felt that it was no time for false delicacy—"take hold of it tight."

By this means, and following her preserver inch by inch, she accomplished the descent in safety.

"Upon my word, Mr. Aird," she said presently, as soon as she found her footing and her breath, "I am greatly obliged to you."

"I assure you, madam," he replied with a bow, "that it gave me much pleasure to assist you."

"And only to think," she cried, "that I should have incurred this peril on an errand of mercy!"

"That indeed seems very surprising," returned her deliverer, gravely.

"Yes, I came to seek you and your dear boy." Here, in looking solemnly upwards to give evidence of her sincerity, she caught sight of the cliff. "Good

gracious!" she exclaimed, "how am I ever to get up again?"

"We will see to that afterwards," said Mr. Aird, drily. "First accomplish the errand of mercy."

"Well, it's about poor Mr. Josceline and his daughter. I have just made their acquaintance, and a more interesting couple you cannot imagine."

"Indeed!" answered Mr. Aird, in a tone which unmistakably conveyed, "They don't interest *me* in the least."

"Poor Mr. Josceline is a great invalid, Mr. Aird, like yourself."

"Who told you I was a great invalid, ma'am?" inquired the old Indian, sharply.

As a matter of fact Mrs. Armytage had gathered from one of the hotel servants that Mr. Aird was occasionally subject to great pain, and had jumped to the conclusion, which, indeed, was a correct one, that he was the victim of some chronic complaint.

"Nobody told me," she cried, "but I gathered from the expression of your face that you were a sufferer. If it is not so, I am delighted to hear it. I am sure you will not feel less for those who do suffer. Mr. Josceline is a martyr to rheumatism of the heart."

"He must be a very communicative individual, madam, to have told you all that on so short an acquaintance."

"On the contrary, he is a reserved man, but one who can appreciate and reciprocate genuine sympathy. He and his daughter wish to come to the *table-d'hôte* this afternoon, but their places will be next the door, and he is afraid of the draught. He did not tell me so, you will understand, but I gathered it. Now it

struck me that you would not mind letting them have your seats—which are quite sheltered—and moving down a couple of places.”

“My dear madam, I have not the least objection to your new friends sitting on my side of the table, but why should they not sit below instead of above us?”

“I thought of that of course; that would be the proper course; but that would separate your dear boy from his friend, Mr. Vernon. And if they went below him, there would be the draught again.”

“Don’t send away Mr. Vernon, papa,” pleaded little Davey. “I love Mr. Vernon.”

“That’s just what I thought,” observed Mrs. Armytage; “I said to myself, ‘There’s little Davey and his friend to be considered.’”

“I am obliged to you, madam,” said Mr. Aird, his natural astuteness failing him for once in view of this proof of solicitude for his offspring. You may tell Mr. Josceline that he may have my place with pleasure.”

“That is only what I expected of you,” exclaimed Mrs. Armytage, not, however, without some secret exultation at the success of her diplomacy. “I was sure you would be glad to oblige a gentleman of Mr. Josceline’s quality. Now, if I could only get up that cliff.”

This aspiration had preoccupied her mind, or she would never have expressed her satisfaction in terms so injudicious, which aroused, if not her companion’s suspicions, at least his prejudices. He had reigned supreme for too many years as Chief Commissioner at Bundelcumbad to admit the pretensions of any

British Brahmin, and thought himself quite as much a person of quality as this sprig of nobility.

"I dragged you down, madam," he observed, coldly, "but I honestly tell you that I am quite unequal to the task of dragging you up."

"Pray don't say that, Mr. Aird," pleaded the lady. Time was getting on, and the idea of being late at the *table d'hôte* on a supreme occasion presented itself to her in colours of eclipse. "I could not attempt such a thing alone."

"Nevertheless, when the tide comes up, in about half an hour," said the other, looking at his watch, "I think you will make an effort. Davey, my boy, you and I must be going."

"You would never desert a female in distress," exclaimed the unfortunate lady.

"Of course not, my dear madam; I'll send a boat round from the village. The Professor will come for you himself, no doubt. I'll tell Mrs. Trant about the change of places, and ask her to keep an *entrée* warm for you."

Hand in hand with the child, he had already ascended the cliff beyond her reach, or it is certain she would have clung to him like an octopus. As it was, this melancholy result of her diplomacy, at the very moment, too, of its seeming triumph, was too much for her endurance; she plumped down on the sand, with her back to the foe, and fairly burst into tears of vexation.

CHAPTER VII.

WHEN THE CAT'S AWAY.

I AM afraid Mr. Aird did not increase his ordinary rate of speed when returning to the hotel. Little Davey and he had always plenty to talk about in the colours of the sea and sky, the grotesque formation of cliff and rocks, and all the wonders of the shore. Once the child inquired, but with more curiosity than apprehension, "The tide won't come up and drown Mrs. Armytage, will it, papa?" but on being assured that it would not, the topic was dismissed as one of inferior interest. Before they reached home, however, they met the Professor himself, returning from a scientific expedition, with his butterfly net and a tin case slung round his neck, such as Gargantua might have used for his sandwiches.

On hearing that Mrs. Armytage was a prisoner in Wychett Cove he expressed a mild surprise. "There is nothing to be gathered there but samphire; the painted lady hardly ever visits it, and is difficult to catch on the sand. What on earth took her there, I wonder?"

Mr. Aird shrugged his shoulders. "Perhaps she went to bathe, and, finding us on the shore, didn't like to mention it. She begged me to tell you she wished a boat sent for her."

"Dear me," said the Professor, "that reminds me; I have found a curious specimen of the oar-beetle. We are told, Davey, we might learn of the little nautilus how to sail; we could also learn of the oar-beetle how to row."

He sat down, opened his case, and began to lecture. Davey was entranced with the specimen, and that was enough for Mr. Aird. Never had professor a more attentive audience. Presently, upon the summer air was borne the sound of a distant gong.

"That's the half-hour bell for the *table d'hôte*!" exclaimed Mr. Aird. "Why, my dear sir, you have quite forgotten Mrs. Armytage."

"Not at all, not at all," said the professor, with a last fond look at his entomological treasures ere he closed the box. "Let me see, what was it you said she wanted? Yes; I remember—a boat."

He moved pensively towards the village to procure the article, while Mr. Aird repaired to Mrs. Trant's parlour to give notice of the new arrangements at table.

The astonishment of the Joscelines was considerable when the neat-handed Phœbe appeared in their apartment and informed them, with Mr. Aird's compliments, that he had much pleasure in giving up his seats that Mr. Josceline and his daughter might be out of the draught.

"There must be some mistake," said Ella.

"Not at all, Miss," said Phœbe. "Mr. Aird understood from Mrs. Armytage that your papa had the rheumatics."

"Quite right," interposed Mr. Josceline, blandly. "Say we are deeply obliged to him. By the bye, where *are* the seats?"

"At the head of the table, sir, next to Mrs. Armytage herself."

"I thought so," murmured Mr. Josceline; then, when the girl had left the room, "The fact is, my

dear Ella, our friend Mrs. Armytage is Metternich, Talleyrand, and Machiavelli all rolled into one. But some little rift has taken place in the lute of her diplomacy. However, it is very kind of this Mr. Aird."

Ella thought so also, but felt no little surprise that her father should have expressed such a sense of a stranger's civility; for, though his good manners forbade his showing any pride in the ordinary sense of the word, he was by nature somewhat exclusive, and rarely welcomed attentions which he had not encouraged. On this occasion, however, when Mr. Josceline took his seat at table, he was not only gracious in his personal acknowledgment of Mr. Aird's kindness, but so cordial that that gentleman was unable to maintain his determined attitude of frigid politeness; it melted before Mr. Josceline's courtesy, and fairly gave way before the smile which accompanied Ella's introduction to him.

When Mr. Josceline said, "I am afraid our good friend Mrs. Armytage somewhat exaggerated my little ailment," his look and tone so fully conveyed he understood that lady, that Mr. Aird was drawn towards him still more nearly; and when Ella had taken friendly notice of little Davey—which was as natural for her to do as for a duck to take to the water—the father's heart was won.

In the meanwhile, the two new arrivals were the centre of general attraction—a circumstance which, though well perceived by the one, was unobserved by the other, and caused Mrs. Percival-Lott to remark to her husband in a whisper that a little shyness in a young girl was in her opinion more becoming than an

artificial confidence. The sensation they produced, however, was not a little counteracted by that excited by the absence of Mrs. Armytage, whose vacant chair at the head of the table rivalled in interest, in Mrs. Jennynge's eyes, that of Banquo's in *Macbeth*. Was her rival there, or was she not there? she could scarcely tell; but a feeling of enfranchisement gradually gathered strength within her.

It was not until the soup was removed, that Mr. Aird looked across the table, and inquired of the Professor whether he had despatched the boat for Mrs. Armytage.

"The boat?" returned the Professor, who as usual was immersed in scientific speculation—"oh, yes, I did! but, the wind and tide being both against it, the man said it would take time."

"But, my good sir," observed Mr. Vernon, who had learned the state of affairs from his little neighbour, "it is almost high tide. Will not your wife be in some danger?"

"Our neap tides," returned the Professor, philosophically, "unless the wind is exceptionally high, do not rise on this part of the coast much beyond five feet."

It occurred to the company that as Mrs. Armytage also was certainly not much "beyond five feet," she might suffer considerable inconvenience even from a neap tide, but it seemed cruel to disturb such equanimity. Nevertheless, a touch of sympathy was not altogether wanting.

"I have ordered one of the *entrées* to be kept warm and brought in for her," observed Mr. Aird, "as soon as she makes her appearance."

"You are very good," said the Professor, looking ruefully at his champagne, to which he had helped himself much more liberally than circumstances had generally permitted him to do; "but I think, after so trying an adventure, she had better dine quietly in her own apartment."

"*Much* better," assented Mrs. Jennynge, confidently. "If she has got wet, indeed, I should recommend her going to bed immediately, with a hot bottle to her feet, and a mustard plaster over her chest."

"That sounds very sensible," agreed the Professor.

"I am told," said Mr. Aird, gravely, "that the only sure method of avoiding the possible effects of a severe cold is to keep one's room, thereby maintaining an equable temperature, for several days."

"There's nothing more in accordance with the rules of science," assented the Professor, drily; "but there is occasionally a difficulty with the patient."

"But a husband should use his authority," remarked Mrs. Jennynge.

"You must remember, my dear madam," whispered the Professor, slyly, as he emptied the last dregs of the champagne bottle, "that you are a widow."

"Indeed, sir, I can never forget it," she answered, with a sentimental sigh. "By the bye, Mr. Felspar, we have not had the pleasure of seeing you this morning."

Mr. Felspar was employed on a work of art for Mrs. Jennynge, which, though of a melancholy nature, had its compensations for her: he was painting a picture of her late husband, from photographs and other data with which she was constantly supplying him in the way of traits and recollections; and though,

as she observed, "it reopened the floodgates of memory," it also gave her the opportunity of "gushing" to her heart's content, and also of patronising the artist.

"The weather was so beautiful that I could not resist doing a little out-of-door work this morning; but you will see me to-morrow," said Mr. Felspar.

Mrs. Jennynge shook her head in a manner that reprobated out-of-door work as compared with that of making illustrations from the tomb; and Mr. Vernon observed, "Since the weather has set in so fine, by the way, how about our picnic?"

The project had long been a topic of general conversation at the *Ultramarine*, but hitherto a continuance of wet weather had prevented its accomplishment; moreover, the idea, though emanating from Vernon, had, as usual, been seized upon and made use of as her own by Mrs. Armytage, which alone sufficed, in the eyes of some of the party, to make it unpopular. Now, however, that that lady was absent, and a ray of hope began to twinkle that she might be shut up with an attack of bronchitis, or at least catarrh, for some days, the proposal was received with favour.

"I doat upon picnics," observed Miss Jennynge, "and so does mamma."

"It seems to me, my dear," remarked that lady, whose courage was growing with every moment of her enemy's absence, "that we are not quite in the same position as we were when we last discussed that subject."

"Hear! hear!" said Mr. Percival-Lott, softly; partly to encourage the speaker, and partly to express sym-

pathy with the feelings which he imagined to be actuating her.

"When the cat's away," whispered Mr. Wallace to his wife, "the mice will play. That's what the old lady means."

Mrs. Wallace laughed as she always did at her husband's jokes; an excellent thing in any wife, and certainly not more than may be fairly expected when, as in this case, the husband makes but one joke a year or so; but her little outburst of hilarity, as it happened, was most unfortunate.

"I was about to say," continued Mrs. Jennynge, gravely, "when interrupted by what I must be permitted to designate somewhat misplaced laughter, that we are not quite in the same position as when the subject of the picnic was first mooted, by reason of an addition—I am sure a most welcome addition—to our little party."

"If you are so good as to allude to myself and daughter, madam," said Mr. Josceline, as Mrs. Jennynge gravely inclined her head in his direction, to give point to her remark, "I am sure we shall be only too happy to fall into any scheme for the general amusement."

"Then, Mr. Aird," said Mrs. Jennynge, whose style, it will be seen, had borrowed something of the majesty of her absent rival, "what do you think of a picnic on the Danecliff—we can't take advantage too quickly of this magnificent sunshine—say to-morrow?"

"My dear madam, if you ask me what I think of a picnic," returned the ex-Commissioner, stiffly—for the patronage which even from Mrs. Armytage was unpalatable to him was from Mrs. Jennynge intolerable

—“I can only say that I detest it; I believe it to be an invention of the doctors to promote diseases of the lungs and liver.”

Before any one could combat this amazing dogma, “What do *you* think of a picnic, Davey?” inquired Mr. Vernon of his young friend.

“If it’s dining in the open air,” replied the little fellow, cautiously, “I should like it dearly. We could sit in the trench of the Danecliff, papa dear, quite out of the wind.”

“Supposing the rash act has been determined upon, Mrs. Jennynge,” pursued Mr. Aird, with a transparent pretence of having paid no attention to the opinion of his offspring, “I think the Danecliff will be as good a place as any for the commission of it. It’s close to home, so that we can get there and back again and have the whole thing over as soon as possible.”

Under cover of this attractive picture of the promised treat, Ella had a hearty laugh at the sudden change of front assumed by her neighbour. “I don’t think papa is fond of you at all, Davey,” she said to the child, with a kind smile.

“Oh, but he is, and so is Verney!” replied the little fellow, simply.

“We are fond of him, Miss Josceline; but I do assure you we do not spoil him,” observed the young gentleman thus alluded to. “We are supposed to have discovered the happy medium between spoiling and indulging.”

“Mr. Vernon does spoil the boy,” said Mr. Aird, delighted with this notice of his favourite; “it is all I

can do, Miss Josceline, by reproof and—and—severities, to counteract it.”

The notion of severities, as practised on little Davey by his parent, tickled his two listeners very much, and caused them to interchange laughing looks, to which Mr. Felspar contributed his quota.

“I am glad, Aird,” he remarked, “that somebody has at last had the courage to hint to you what a wicked boy Davey is growing up.”

“But I never said that, indeed,” protested Ella.

“My dear young lady, it is never worth while to notice what Mr. Felspar says,” observed Mr. Aird, with gravity. “But, especially, don’t you listen to him if he proposes to paint you.”

Ella blushed a little, becomingly and not confusedly, for the old Indian’s tone was too good-natured to cause her any real embarrassment. She found herself getting on with her new neighbours much more agreeably than she had anticipated; while Mr. Josceline, on his part, had made a conquest, by quite other means, of Mrs. Jennynge and her daughter. If Mrs. Armytage had been present, and, as it were, in possession of him, they would, perhaps, have been inclined to be antagonistic, and given him some trouble; but, as it was, his easy manners (which they afterwards spoke of as his “affability”) and dexterously manifested desire to please—combined, of course, with the recurring recollection that he was own brother to the Earl of Boroughby—caused them to fall easy victims. Next to natural gaiety and good manners (which are a rarity indeed) the art of assuming them is invaluable, and Mr. Josceline possessed it in perfection. When he ordered a pint of her favourite

wine for himself, because he said a lady's opinion upon hock was incontestable by reason of the delicacy of her taste, Mrs. Jennynge experienced a fanatical impulse, difficult to repress, to tell him to order a gallon at her own expense. Nay, on the wine question, he even contrived to get counsel's opinion from Mr. Wallace and Mr. Percival-Lott (who knew one hock from another rather less than if it had been the hock of a horse), and, in short, so ingratiated himself with the whole party that it seemed a wonder to them how the *table-d'hôte* could have ever got on without him.

It was when, thanks to him (for it had never been so before), conversation was becoming general, and little jets of laughter were being indulged in on all sides, that a loud tap was suddenly heard at the bay window. It was as though twelve o'clock had struck, and all Cinderella's footmen and horses had become rats and mice. Every one in a moment was as still as a mouse; for there stood Mrs. Armytage with her nose flattened against the pane, her eyes flashing fire, and her fingers beckoning to her husband with unmistakable vehemence.

"I think I had better go," said the Professor, rising, as the terrible vision vanished in the direction of the front door. "Why, the man said she couldn't be back for an hour and a half! I think she must have climbed up the cliff after all!"

No one had a doubt of it who had caught sight of Mrs. Armytage's gloves and attire, which exhibited undoubted signs of a prolonged pilgrimage upon hands and knees.

"Poor thing! Shall I go and see what I can do for her, papa?" whispered Ella, compassionately.

Mr. Josceline shook his head decisively. He knew that what would do Mrs. Armytage more good than anything just then was to speak her mind to the Professor.

"She seems to have had a bit of a scramble," observed Mrs. Jennynge, it must be owned in no very pathetic tones.

"I am sure I should not like to have got up those cliffs," exclaimed her daughter; and indeed, with her high heels, her tight dress, and her waggling train, it would have been a feat worthy of record.

"I am very sorry for her—exceedingly sorry," continued Mrs. Jennynge; "but, except for anxiety on her account, I must say we have had a very pleasant dinner."

"Yes; but there's one thing," observed Mrs. Wallace, "which has made me miserable all the time. We have been thirteen at table, and therefore, you know, one of us is sure to die before the year is out."

"Oh, how horrid!" exclaimed Mrs. Percival-Lott, with a becoming shudder. "How can you talk of such things?"

"It's never done in the best society," murmured Mrs. Jennynge, looking to Mr. Josceline for corroboration. She was the oldest person present, and naturally deemed the remark personal as well as objectionable.

"It is a superstition, foolish enough in itself," remarked Felspar, "and yet, as it happens, borne out by facts. The actuaries tell us that the probability is that one person out of thirteen will really 'join the majority' in twelve months."

"Is that true?" whispered Mr. Aird, anxiously, to Vernon, and with an involuntary glance at the boy beside him.

"Yes, quite true—of adults. It would not be so of a party of young people, of course."

As the ladies rose to go, Mr. Aird uttered a sigh of relief which might have been mistaken for an incivility.

CHAPTER VIII.

TWO METHODS OF PLEASING.

By desire of her father, Ella repaired after dinner to the ladies' drawing-room, instead of returning, as she would have preferred, to their own sitting-room; he was confident that the more they knew of her, the more she would be liked by her own sex (or at least by the best of them), and he did not wish them to compromise themselves by expressing in her absence an opinion which, on a short acquaintance, might fall short of her merits. As a man of the world he was well aware that, when a new arrival comes under discussion in any community, the general tendency is to criticise rather than to commend; and for the same reason he himself repaired with the gentlemen to the billiard-room. He would have pressed the matter on Ella still more earnestly had it been necessary, had he been aware of the advantage she possessed on that particular evening, in the absence of Mrs. Armytage, whose patronage would have told sorely against her with the rest. The attempts made by Mrs. Jennynge to place Ella under her own protection were feeble

(because of the respect of that lady for her young friend's exalted rank), and easily put aside; and though Miss Jennynge's civility was a little overwhelming, she submitted to it with good-natured grace. If Mrs. Percival-Lott was a little stately, something must be excused to a bride (for such she really was) on the first occasion she had enjoyed of lording it over an unmarried girl of about her own age. Her husband (cunning fellow) had expressed his opinion to her that Miss Josceline did not bear close inspection—he had certainly stared enough at her at dinner to justify him in giving judgment on that point—and Mrs. Lott, while quite agreeing with him, had therefore become mollified in respect to that young lady.

As for Mrs. Wallace, Ella's cheerful smile and pleasant manner, so very different from that with which the other ladies treated her, at once won her simple heart. When the tea was handed round, Ella praised the cream, which indeed was very different at the *Ultramarine* to hotel cream in general.

"It is like Devonshire cream," she said.

"Lor', my dear, that shows you have never been in Devonshire!" cried the farmer's wife. "I should like you to taste our cream at Foracre Farm." Whereupon Ella said she should like to have the opportunity, and Mrs. Wallace rejoined she would be "kindly welcome." It was not a very brilliant reply, but it had the merit of genuineness—in which brilliant replies are sometimes wanting—for it was plain she meant it.

There was a piano in the room, at which each of the young ladies sat down in turn, on Mrs. Jennynge's invitation. Her daughter sang an Italian song, which, however attractive to a trained ear, was a little be-

wildering in its "alarms and excursions," and which, requiring a very open mouth, and an exertion of the lungs that brought all the blood to the face, did not add to her personal beauty; the suspected bride warbled about a rover of the sea, to whom it would appear she had been wildly attached before she met with Mr. Lott; and Ella sang that simple but touching ditty "The Land of the Leal."

"Now that's what *I* call singing!" observed Mrs. Wallace, wiping her eyes, which had been shedding a rain of quiet tears throughout this performance—"I'm wearin' awa', John, like snow when it's thaw, John; that's just what our poor Jeannie did."

"Was that your daughter?" inquired Ella, tenderly.

"No, my dear; she was my niece. God did not bless me with a daughter, but He lent me one who loved me as dearly as though she had been, though she was but my niece by marriage; then he thought fit to take her from me. His will be done. She was not unlike yourself, my dear, but older; perhaps half-way between you and Miss Jennynge yonder."

"Really, Mrs. Wallace," exclaimed the young lady alluded to, "I wish you would find some other topic to talk about besides death! You have already made everybody uncomfortable once before this evening by your reference to our being thirteen at table."

"I'm very sorry," said Mrs. Wallace, humbly; "but it's a belief in Devonshire that when thirteen——"

"Then keep it for Devonshire," interrupted Miss Jennynge, sharply; "one comes to an hotel to enjoy oneself, madam, not to be preached at."

"That's very true," returned Mrs. Wallace, "and I

ask your pardon for speaking just now from a full heart. To young people like yourself it must have sounded out of tune, as you said of the pianner; whereas your good mother and me, who are growing near our latter ends——”

“Do you paint, Miss Josceline, as well as sing?” interrupted Mrs. Jennynge, with abruptness, and turning very red.

“I do a little; I am very fond of it.”

“Ah, you’re a judge of paintings, no doubt; then you must come to our room to-morrow, and see my daughter’s sketches.”

“Oh, they are nothing,” said Miss Jennynge, carelessly; “they are merely records of our travels on the Continent.”

“That is not the opinion of some good judges, my dear Anastasia,” continued her mother, in mild remonstrance. “I also have some records of another kind, Miss Josceline, to show you,” she added, pathetically; “shall we say eleven o’clock? In the afternoon, you know, there will be the picnic.”

“I am sure I shall be very happy,” said Ella; which I am afraid was very far from being the truth. She had one of those natures, eminently unphilosophic, which prompts their possessor to give others pleasure at any sacrifice of herself, and it should be added that she generally achieved her object.

Her father was cast in a very different mould; yet he, too, on the whole, may be said to have made it his business to increase the sum of human happiness. He was thought to be “the best company in the world” by very many persons of his own sex who were supposed to be judges in such a matter; and

with ladies he had been at least equally popular. Advancing years, however, and indifferent health had, without dulling his natural gaiety, made the exhibition of it more difficult, since it was now necessary to conceal from others his private sense of effort; and especially was this the case when, as in the present instance, the society it was his mission to captivate was not to his taste. The atmosphere of a public billiard-room was, indeed, to the last degree unfavourable to such talents as those possessed by Mr. Josceline, and it was quite marvellous, under the circumstances, how they contrived to flourish: it resembled the success achieved in some East-end window-garden society, where a tea rose, with quite an unexpected felicity of association, is made to blossom in a milk-jug.

Mr. Josceline could play billiards of course—he could play anything, from quadrille to American bowls, that men of fashion did play—not that he liked games, but because not to know them is sometimes a serious social disadvantage; but he was not a first-rate performer with the cue. It does not make a man popular to be so, because he is always beating people with it; his hand, too, is against every man's—not as at whist, where he has at least a partner to share his good fortune. At pool, indeed, which was the game proposed to be played on the present occasion, there is no easier method of winning the suffrages of one's fellow-creatures than to play indifferently; but Mr. Josceline scorned a triumph so ignoble, and, moreover, it had of late become a principle with him, never—unless something of importance was to be gained by it—to part with ready money. He could have held his own, had he cared to do so, with Mr.

Felspar and Mr. Vernon; but not with Mr. Percival-Lott, who, like some doughty knight of old who had made a vow always to wear his visor down, made up for his silence in bower and hall by his dexterity with the cue, and took life after life with as much *sang-froid* as a crusader slaying Pagans; with this great advantage over his prototype, that he also pocketed their ransoms.

It was no pleasure to Mr. Josceline, as it was certainly no profit, to contend with this young gentleman; and after he had lost a few sixpennies with a gayer air than some others wear in winning them, he put by his cue on plea of fatigue, and watched the players from the sofa. The Professor was still closeted with his wife, and Mr. Aird, as usual, before smoking his cheroot, had gone to superintend little Davey's sleeping arrangements; so Mr. Josceline was left alone with the three young gentlemen. Under such circumstances, some men of mature years, who have a reputation for talk, recommend themselves to their company by attempting the *rôle* of Falstaff and succeeding in that of Silenus; but Mr. Josceline never stooped so low even to conquer. He told them anecdotes of the game, as though the literature of billiards had been his study, interspersed with such lively reminiscences of his own, of bets and wagers, as made Vernon and Felspar shake with laughter, and caused Mr. Percival-Lott to pause on his stroke—as the wild swan paused in her cloud at the song of the bard—ere he dropped his adversary into the pocket. When Mr. Aird appeared Mr. Josceline's tactics altogether altered. He became a patient listener, with a feverish desire to hear the truth about our Indian Empire, and even

accepted from the ex-Commissioner one of its native productions in the shape of a cheroot, which he would as soon have thought of smoking as of eating. "If you will allow me," he said, "I will put this in my cigarette case as a *bonne bouche*."

The whole case of the cartridges, the chupatties, and the other causes of the mutiny were gone into by Mr. Aird, at a length that probably made his companion think, with Artemus Ward, that 'Indians is pison wherever found;' but his apparent interest never flagged. Nay, like some noble savage at the stake, he himself suggested fresh implements of torture to his persecutor.

"Do you think the Sepoys may be really trusted now?" he inquired.

"No, sir; I will tell you what occurred six months ago, to my own personal knowledge. I was engaged to dine with the 123rd at Bundelcumbad. By the merest accident one of the officers chanced to glance into the cooking-tent, and this is what he saw. There was a joint roasting for the mess dinner, and half-a-dozen of the officers' servants were standing round it, spitting on it. That is their way of showing contempt; and, as they couldn't spit on us, they did it by deputy. These same Sepoys, looking as if butter wouldn't melt in their mouths even in that climate, waited at dinner, each standing behind his master's chair. When the mutton was brought up each officer rose and produced a revolver. The colonel made a neat little speech, inviting the men to take their places at the table, or, as the other alternative, to have their brains blown out. As he was a very determined man, they accepted his hospitality, though, after what had happened to

the joint in the kitchen, it involved the loss of caste to every one of them. One has heard of "eating the leek," but that is nothing in comparison with that meal of the Sepoys at Bundelcumbad; it would have taken all Mr. Felspar's art to depict their countenances. The anecdote is trivial, but it is a fact, and I think a significant one as regards the adhesion of the Sepoys to the British 'raj.'"

"A more striking illustration of the social and political situation," said Mr. Josceline, gravely, "I never heard. It is a volume of history in itself;" and he rose from his seat with a murmur about the necessity of his keeping early hours, but in reality to prevent the issue of a second volume. To him, to listen to a man expounding a theory was as bad as though he were detailing a grievance; it gave him a positive mental torture of which more phlegmatic natures have no experience, and in his present state of ill-health the pangs of boredom were felt more severely than usual. It must certainly, therefore, have been for some weighty reason that Mr. Josceline had been so patient under the flow of eloquence of the Commissioner of Bundelcumbad, and had even, as it were, pulled the string of the shower-bath with his own dainty hand.

CHAPTER IX.

MRS. AND MISS JENNYNGE.

It is a trite observation, that petty things make up the sum of our lives, and that if the effect of them is, on the whole, agreeable, one or two great misfortunes can be borne *per contra* with comparative philosophy. It is not, however, so well understood how the indulgence in certain tastes, and even in certain amusements, will cause them in time to assume immense proportions in our own minds, so that, providing these are left to us, the weightier matters of the Law—and alas! even of the Gospel—sink into comparative insignificance. Among the male sex, the pursuit of what men call gallantry, and moralists by another name, is a striking instance of this, and is by no means confined to the frivolous and idle; while the game of whist is, for others, equally attractive. Metternich, though he applied himself to that amusement late in life, became so absorbed in it that even politics were neglected for it; and it is on record that several hundred persons were put to death (it was in Hungary, or some out-of-the-way place, so that no great stir was made about it) through an express messenger being detained for some hours in his ante-room, while he was just playing that last rubber which possesses such elastic attributes, and has kept many a better man up to the small hours, who otherwise makes it a principle to be in bed by ten o'clock.

What is rather curious, women, who are accused of frittering away their time on little things, rarely exhibit such complete devotion to trifles; their tastes,

as the poet tells us are their passions, compared with ours, are "as moonlight unto sunlight, and as water unto wine." Nevertheless, some ladies have hobbies which they ride with considerable persistence. Mrs. Jennynge's hobby was a sort of hearse-horse, for it consisted in a devotion to the memory of her late second husband. Some suggested that this arose from the consciousness that a balance of affection was still due to him, since while he was alive she had not overwhelmed him with demonstrations of it; but the more charitable refused to countenance this scandal. Mr. Nathaniel Jennynge, who was much her senior, had, they said, entertained a prejudice against third marriages, and it was confidently expected that he would make a material protest against them in his will; whereas he had omitted to do so, and it was, they said, out of gratitude to him for his forbearance that his widow burnt incense to his manes.

Miss Anastasia, who had been left more dependent upon her mother than she wished people to know, was not very enthusiastic in these pious observances, though she had her reasons for a show of respect for them; but you could not know Mrs. Jennynge long without hearing a good deal more of her dear departed—"not lost," she said, "but gone before"—than, as a stranger to that good man, you were likely to want.

It was, of course, with no apprehensions of this nature, but still with no pleasurable expectations, that Ella repaired next morning at the time appointed to Mrs. Jennynge's apartment. She had not taken very kindly either to that lady or her daughter, but she always kept her word; and, moreover, not a little to

her surprise, her father had expressed satisfaction at the invitation.

"Mrs. Jennynge evidently wishes to make friends, my dear, and young people should never refuse the hand of welcome."

The last sentence, which certainly did not resemble Mr. Josceline's style, he had opportunely discovered in that stray volume of the *Mirror* for 1816 among "the maxims and sentiments," though he did not think it worth while to acknowledge his indebtedness.

Mrs. Jennynge and her daughter were in what the former would have called *en grande tenue*—attired with an elegance appropriate to a visit from the granddaughter of the Earl of Boroughby—while their apartment was arranged with a studied carelessness which would no doubt have reminded her of the "interiors" at Boroughby Park, only she had never chanced to see them. There was an assemblage of nearly twenty splendidly bound volumes on the bookshelf, with a French dictionary hidden behind them, to which Mrs. Jennynge by no means intended to allude when she said that "she never moved without her library." On one table was every description of painting materials that the wiliness of the dealer in art could suggest; and on the other the most elaborate arrangement for the manufacture of artificial flowers in wax, for which the elder lady was wont to say with modesty, but some anomalousness of expression, that she had some little "natural gift." As a matter of fact she spent half her time about it, and placed her friends in much embarrassment from their inability to guess without assistance what object of nature she was engaged in imitating. Fortunately the variety

was limited, since she only affected flowers of a hue that typified her forlorn condition. On the present occasion she was evolving violets, which did not admit of much confusion with their floral rivals. "I cannot lay them 'fresh and fresh,'" she said (a phrase which had an unfortunate resemblance to the "hot and hot" of the cheap restaurateur) "upon his grave, my dear Miss Josceline; but I produce them, as you see, in fac-simile, as a chaplet for his marble brow."

"She is speaking of papa," observed Anastasia, in frigid explanation.

"Oh, indeed!" said Ella. It was not a very sympathetic reply, but then she had hardly recovered from the impression at first produced upon her mind that Mrs. Jennynge was insane.

"I venture to think they have some *vraisemblance*," resumed the mourner, critically; "and they have this advantage over the violet of our fields, that they do not fade and perish as, alas! those whom we love are wont to do, unless you put them to the fire."

The last remark, of course, referred to the wax violets and not to the deceased, who, it is to be hoped, was not being exposed to such a crucial test. "I am doing some amaranths for his dear birthday," she continued, pathetically; "you know the amaranth, of course?"

It was most fortunate that Mrs. Jennynge here reproduced a specimen in wax of that most classical, and, as poor Ella had imagined, mythological flower, and thus enabled her visitor to conceal ignorance in admiration. "These and a sprig of lavender are all the tributes fate has permitted me to pay to him."

These words, so far beyond her ordinary style,

Mrs. Jennynge delivered with a corresponding elevation of tone and manner; their effect upon her visitor was, however, naturally weakened by the fact that she knew nothing about the deceased. There was another circumstance which made any expression of sympathy a little difficult. Anastasia not only took no part in the conversation, but obviously despised it. She stood gloomily regarding her two companions with her thumb in her mouth; if you had taken it out and examined it, you would have found it, from constant suction, pale and flabby like the thumb of a washerwoman. Whenever she was annoyed, and especially, as on the present occasion, by her mother's behaviour, she took to her thumb for comfort. It was an admirable safety valve for her temper, since while she was sucking it she was compelled to be silent; but to a stranger its effect as a silent commentary upon a eulogy of the dead was, to say the least of it, incongruous.

"Behind this screen," continued Mrs. Jennynge, pointing to a spacious enclosure of red baize used in winter time in the *salle à manger* to keep off the draught from the door, "are such memorials of dear Nathaniel as I am able to carry about with me. I do not show them to everyone; but you, with your long line of noble ancestry, will know how to appreciate devotion to the departed."

She led the way behind the screen, and poor Ella followed; a last glance at Anastasia revealed her frowning heavily, and sucking with such indignant vigour at her thumb that the action was audible, like that of an air-pump. "These are Nathaniel's photographs; they bear a likeness to him of course, but ah!

what a difference to what he was in life! The cabinets are, it is thought, the best."

Even the cabinets, however, did not convey a very favourable impression of the deceased Mr. Jennynge. Perhaps the sun had not been propitious, but it had certainly portrayed a very commonplace individual—a short, pudgy man with a book in his hand, which, from the expression on his face, ought to have been a publican's ledger; it was labelled "Lyrics of the Heart." However, it was quite clear that Mr. Nathaniel Jennynge had not known what to do with it, nor even how to hold it. The circumstances of his finding himself in a mossy cavern, with a fountain springing up in alarming proximity to his white waistcoat, had doubtless deprived him of his usual repose of manner, for he looked very ill at ease. In another and smaller picture he was represented as leaning on a broken column in what was meant to be an attitude of meditation; but it was impossible to escape from the conviction that he had taken more than was good for him, and felt the need of external support.

"I think I like the cabinet one best," observed Ella, quietly.

"So most people say," sighed Mrs. Jennynge; "but of course it does not satisfy *me*."

"Of course not," said poor Ella; thinking, indeed, that, if it did, Mrs. Jennynge must be very easily satisfied. "Photographs seldom give the characteristic expression."

"You are quite right, my dear Miss Josceline. That is the very reason why I have employed Mr. Felspar—quite regardless of expense—to paint me a picture of my Nathaniel. I have supplied him with

all the materials. This is his head—don't be afraid, my dear," for Ella had started in alarm at the object presented to her notice. "It is only a cast taken after death. Perhaps you have never seen one before?"

It so happened that Ella had seen one; and that very circumstance had contributed to her apprehensions. The girls at her Clapham academy had once been taken for a treat to Madame Tussaud's exhibition, and the entertainment had very injudiciously included the Room of Horrors. It seemed to her that she was now looking at some duplicate specimen of those homicidal heads.

"It is not pretty, of course," admitted Mrs. Jenynge, "but to the eye of an artist it is invaluable. What I say to Mr. Felspar is, 'Here are the photographs of my dear Nathaniel, and this is the original'—dear me, there *is* Mr. Felspar."

The door of the room was opened, and the artist's voice was heard interchanging "How d'ye doos" with Miss Anastasia. Ella seized the opportunity to escape, somewhat abruptly, from the screen and its memorials; and perhaps the joy of enfranchisement gave to her acknowledgment of the artist's polite greeting a little more warmth than it would otherwise have exhibited. At all events, Mr. Felspar looked grateful for it, as he threw back his flowing hair by a quick movement of his head—an action as natural to him, when pleased, as it is to a dog to wag his tail.

"I had no idea you had a visitor here, Mrs. Jenynge," he said.

"Yes; Miss Josceline was so good as to look in upon us. But that need not take up your time, you

know," she added, brusquely. "You can go on with my picture just the same."

Anastasia's thumb, which had been hurriedly withdrawn from her mouth to welcome the visitor, was within an ace of going in again at this remark; while poor Ella felt hot all over.

Mr. Felspar coloured a little (which was, after all, only professional), but his tone manifested no annoyance as he replied with a smile, "As I work by the piece and not by the day, Mrs. Jennynge, if I waste my time it is not you who suffer from it. I see, by the way," pointing to an unfinished drawing on the table, "that you, Miss Anastasia, have not been idle."

"Oh, it is nothing," returned that young lady, carelessly.

"I have been trying one of those very headlands this morning, Miss Jennynge," observed Ella, "but I have not been nearly so successful. I am sure I could never manage the distances as you have done."

"Mr. Felspar shaded them off for me," answered Anastasia, bluntly.

"Indeed, I gave her but very little help," put in the artist. "If I can be of any similar use to you, Miss Josceline, with these unpleasant distances, you are very welcome to my assistance."

"You are very kind; but I am quite a novice," said Ella, "and it would be very wrong to encroach upon your time."

"Oh, we can spare him for an hour occasionally to *you*, Miss Josceline," remarked Mrs. Jennynge; "though I wouldn't say so to everybody."

Mr. Felspar laughed good-naturedly, which put Ella at her ease; otherwise she would have felt no

little embarrassment, since she naturally imagined that when Mr. Felspar was not rescuing the deceased Mr. Jennynge's features from oblivion, he was engaged professionally in giving lessons to Anastasia; whereas what he did for that young lady was quite gratuitous. At the same time it could hardly be called voluntary, since it was in response to a pretty broad hint of her mother's: "A word of advice from *you*, Mr. Felspar, would be invaluable to my dear Anastasia." Like most very rich people, Mrs. Jennynge derived great gratification from getting anything for nothing.

"When you come to the picnic this afternoon," continued Mr. Felspar, "I hope both you young ladies will bring your sketch-books. There are a great many 'objects of interest,' as the guide-book calls them, to be seen from the Danecliff, by help of which we can improve the shining hour."

"But would it not teach them something to see you at work *now*?" inquired Mrs. Jennynge, graciously; "they will be as quiet as mice, I am sure, so that you could give your attention just the same."

"No, madam," interrupted Mr. Felspar, drily; "when I am engaged on anything of exceptional importance, I find it necessary to work by myself." The tone in which he spoke admitted of no contradiction, else he had hitherto made no objection to Miss Anastasia and her mother being witnesses to his work. But in the case of Miss Josceline, something made him unwilling to exhibit himself before her in the degrading occupation of "pot-boiling"; especially, too, as in delineating the late Mr. Nathaniel Jennynge he had to deviate a great deal from the strict line of truth (as exhibited in the human countenance), and, as regarded

that of beauty, to borrow largely from his imagination. Indeed, he felt not a little uncomfortable, as it was, thus exposed in her presence to their hostess's patronage, and after a little further talk he withdrew himself into the sanctuary formed by the red baize screen, into which he was followed by Mrs. Jennynge.

"I am sorry," said Anastasia, the moment her mother had disappeared, "that mamma should have gone on so to you about papa."

"It is only natural ——" began Ella in extenuation.

"It is *not* natural," interrupted the other, with hushed vehemence; "of course I know what you really think about it—it is a monomania. She had a painted window to his memory in our last house with 'His spirit watches here' upon it; and now we have moved she has had it put up in our new home. His spirit can't watch *everywhere*, you know; it is really too ridiculous."

"Still, if it pleases your mother?" pleaded Ella.

"It doesn't please her," broke in Anastasia, with irritation; "she only wishes other people to believe it does. And, of course, she doesn't impose upon them for an instant. Mr. Felspar, for example, though he is as poor as a rat, is quite ashamed of having undertaken to paint a picture from those horrible things." She pointed to the screen with her thumb, and then thrust it in her mouth as though it were its natural sheath.

It was curious, but very unpleasant, to see such a display of scorn and resentment in one to all appearance so artificial and devoid of human passion; it reminded one of the scream of a peacock.

"Is Mr. Felspar a good artist?" inquired Ella, eager to change the conversation.

"Yes; Mr. Vernon says"—she hesitated a moment, then added, carelessly, "but then, to be sure, he is his friend—that he can do anything he chooses; there are some people who enjoy that sort of reputation, you know, who never do anything. He has a great name, however, for so young a man, in portrait painting. And, of course, his advice even about landscapes and things is worth having."

"And is Mr. Vernon a painter too?"

"Oh, dear, no; he is an author; he writes beautiful poetry and gets it published too—in the magazines. Did you not know that?"

"I know scarcely anything," said Ella, modestly. "I have been shut up at school all my life, and we were not allowed to read the magazines. I shall be quite afraid of Mr. Vernon after what you have told me. And now I must wish you good-bye, as papa may be wanting me."

"But you are coming to the picnic, of course, and will bring your drawing materials, as you promised Mr. Felspar."

"Oh, I think I had rather not do that; I am quite ashamed of my poor efforts."

"No matter; Mr. Felspar will teach you to do better. We must all have a beginning, you know, and it will be such a pleasure to me to work with you."

"You are very good, I am sure," said Ella, gratefully; and took her leave more favourably impressed with her new acquaintance than she had been a few minutes ago.

Perhaps, however, it was not mere goodness that

caused Miss Jennynge to be so pressing in her request that her new acquaintance should bring her drawing materials to the picnic; and I doubt whether she would have pressed it had she seen Ella's sketch of the headland, which, apart from Mr. Felspar's improving touches, was, in reality, considerably superior to her own.

CHAPTER X.

DRIVERS AND WALKERS.

It is not to be supposed that all this time Mrs. Armytage has been nowhere; that the sun (so to speak) of Wallington Bay has dropped out of its own system; it was only in temporary eclipse. Of course there were many inquiries—anxious inquiries—on the morning after her little misadventure, when she did not take her usual place at the public breakfast table, after her health or the want of it; and, on the whole, the reports were reassuring. It was certain that she would not be up and about for a day or two. The Professor did not, indeed, afford this information with his own lips; he was retained in close attendance upon his lady, and could not be interviewed; but Phœbe said that Mrs. Armytage seemed “that bad” with fatigue and worry, and “that shook” with what she had gone through, that she could not get on her feet for days, “if it was ever so.” And yet the picnic to the Danecliff was not postponed on that account.

Mrs. Armytage was not really a bad woman—not perhaps worse, on the whole, than the majority of her own charming sex; but, as a rule, they didn't like

her. She was too managing and too masterful; she got her own way when she was up and doing; but when she was down, which is the crucial test of authority, no one bowed to it; that is, no one but her maid and the Professor, who could not help themselves. Such is the fate of all tyrants. It is a melancholy fact that there are thousands of respectable households who never enjoy themselves so much as in the absence of their head. He may be an excellent man in his way, hard working as a bread-winner, and unselfish in the matter of his own pleasures; but he inspires less of love than fear, and when he is away from his own house it is as though a weight were lifted from the hearts of its inmates. And sometimes, though not so commonly, this is the case with the female head. Mrs. Armytage was no enemy to pleasure, nay, she liked to see people enjoy themselves; but then it must be after her own fashion and under her own control. I remember seeing in an old comic journal of Tory politics a picture of a physical-force Chartist taking his little boy out for a holiday in the fields. The man had a truculent face, and in one hand he held a big stick, and in the other the "Flag of Freedom" newspaper. "Now, look here," he observes to his trembling offspring, at the same time shaking his stick at him, "I have brought you out here to enjoy yourself, and mind you do it, or I'll know the reason why." And of this good man Mrs. Armytage was an unconscious imitator.

Mrs. Jennynge did not even give herself the trouble to deplore her rival's absence, but took the command of the whole expedition with a light heart. She made her arrangements for the picnic with Mrs. Trant, just

as though she had not succeeded to the command by a physical misfortune, and ordered the eatables and drinkables with great cheerfulness, while her prostrate enemy was confined to her own apartment upon a diet of toast and water-gruel. A cart and horse were despatched at one o'clock with all that was required for the feast, and the men had orders to lay the cloth upon the very summit of the hill—for there was scarcely a breath of wind—in order to command the greatest extent of view.

An hour afterwards the whole party started for the rendezvous, Mr. Josceline (by reason of the delicacy of his health) in a pony-carriage belonging to the hotel, with Mrs. Jennynge, while the rest followed on foot. What reason Mrs. Jennynge had for the use of a wheel carriage did not appear; it was certainly not because of her years. Indeed, she looked particularly fresh and (as Mr. Aird rather maliciously added) "blooming;" doubtless she was excited by having such a distinguished person as the new arrival for her companion. The pair on wheels had to make a little *détour* to reach the top of the hill, which afforded opportunity for a little private conversation. If the lady was interested in the history of the house of Boroughby, the gentleman did not disdain to put a question or two respecting that of Jennynge. "Nobility," he observed, in answer to some flattering remarks of his companion, "was no doubt an excellent institution; but what would become of it were not its ranks occasionally recruited from the great names in commerce. That of Jennynge in connection with the useful calling—or might he not term it an art?—of drysalting was not unknown to him."

This fact was very pleasing to Mrs. Jennynge's ears, and secretly a little surprised her.

"My late husband," she nevertheless replied, "was indeed very well known, I believe."

"A great name on 'Change," assented Mr. Josceline, quoting from he was not quite sure what, at a venture.

"Yes, indeed," said Mrs. Jennynge, applying her handkerchief to her eyes; "it was only when they lost him, however, that they found out my dear Nathaniel's value."

She meant his moral worth, but the word 'Change no doubt had led Mr. Josceline's mind into more material channels, for he replied, "I remember reading his will in the papers; he left a princely fortune, did he not?"

"He left me very tidily off," said Mrs. Jennynge, modestly, "but what was money to me when my Nathaniel was gone?"

"Except for the pleasure it might afford you from the exercise of acts of benevolence," suggested Mr. Josceline, gravely.

"Just so," returned the lady, remembering with gusto that she had given 50*l.*, after some haggling, to the widow of Nathaniel's clerk, who had fallen into difficulties. The recollection of this munificence gave her courage. "You, too, Mr. Josceline, have loved and lost," she said.

"Eh, what?" returned that gentleman, rather irritably, for the pony-carriage was not well hung, and he had been just shaken by a rut. Then suddenly becoming conscious of the subject of allusion, he frowned darkly. Mrs. Jennynge was not a sensitive

plant, but she knew when she had leant her hand on broken glass.

"I am afraid I have touched a tender chord, sir; I only meant that you, too, have lost the partner of your joys."

"Yes," he replied, quietly, "it was a long time ago, when my Ella was quite a child; but one does not forget such things."

"Still one ought to—don't you think—in time?" observed Mrs. Jennynge, comfortingly.

"One ought," he assented. "One *does* sometimes."

He glanced at the widow with what she thought the most gentlemanly sigh she had ever heard, and then fixed his eyes on the splash-board.

"Your daughter seems a most charming young lady," observed Mrs. Jennynge, after an interval of silence and embarrassment.

"She was making the very same remark to me this morning about yours," replied Mr. Josceline.

"Anastasia is generally admired—that is, in our own comparatively humble circle of society," said Mrs. Jennynge with humility.

"Beauty and accomplishments, my dear madam, are a nobility in themselves," answered Mr. Josceline, "when, as in her case, they are accompanied by wealth"—he noticed a movement of negation made by the flowers and fruits in his companion's bonnet; it was so slight that by some persons it might have been attributed to the jolting of the vehicle—"or by great expectations," he added hastily, "such endowments make their possessor the equal of any lady in the land."

"The dear girl has expectations, of course," re-

joined Mrs. Jennynge, quietly—"very natural expectations—but she is entirely dependent upon me. My beloved Nathaniel—Mr. Felspar is doing a beautiful picture of him, you must see it some day—placed such entire confidence in my discretion."

"That is not to be wondered at; yet I dare say, like many other loving husbands, he showed himself unwilling that you should form any fresh tie. When, as in your case, a woman has been thus left desolate in the heyday of her youth, it seems so hard——"

"Oh, no; there was no stipulation of any kind," interrupted the lady. "My excellent Nathaniel was too unselfish, too—too——"

"Too reasonable," suggested Mr. Josceline; "well, that was immensely to his credit, for, though there is a great deal of talk about persons in your forlorn condition finding their happiness only in that of others, yet we are human after all, and retain our own individuality, our likes and dislikes, our capacities for affection—is it not so?"

"It is, indeed," said Mrs. Jennynge; and she fixed *her* eyes upon the splash-board.

"Nevertheless," pursued Mr. Josceline in a less plaintive tone, caused, perhaps, by the reflection that he had gone far enough in sentiment for that morning, "nevertheless to persons of our time in life—or rather I should say of mine, for, as Ella and I were agreeing, one can scarcely believe that Miss Jennynge can be a daughter of your own—the contemplation of the pleasures of our children is one of the few enjoyments we have left to us. See yonder how our young people are enjoying themselves;" and he pointed

with his whip to where Ella and Anastasia, accompanied by Vernon and Felspar, could be seen approaching them by a short cut; they were evidently in high good humour, for their laughter rang through the still summer air. Behind them came the suspected bride, pushed (very suspiciously) up the hill by the application of her husband's hands to her waist; next followed Mr. and Mrs. Wallace, with less demonstration of connubial bliss, a sober couple of the "John Anderson" type; while in the rear came Mr. Aird and Davey, hand-in-hand, as usual.

The two young men were in great spirits, which with Vernon was a common case; but Felspar was naturally of a serene and philosophic turn of mind, which was the cause of no little raillery on the part of his friend and fellow-lodger. This afternoon, however, no one could complain of Mr. Felspar on the score of want of vivacity, for he was poking all sorts of fun at Vernon—it must be owned to the young ladies' great amusement—on account of a commission he had received that morning, from his magazine editor, to write the letterpress in verse for a certain illustration to appear in the next monthly number.

"It is generally understood," said Felspar, "that we artists are set to illustrate the poets; but the Jupiter of the 'Mayfair Keepsake' has reversed all that. Mr. Woodlock has a drawing on hand of an Italian organ-boy with a monkey which he chooses to call 'the Exile,' and Vernon is the bard directed to immortalise it in a poem. His eye has been in 'a fine frenzy rolling' ever since breakfast, but he can't find a rhyme to 'exile.'"

In vain Vernon protested that his eye was all right—though not, perhaps, so much directed to the main chance as that of a certain portrait-painter he could mention, and that he didn't want a rhyme to exile: Felspar avowed that he knew better, and besought the young ladies to assist his rhymeless friend. "The poem must be sent by to-morrow's post, and if you can't find a rhyme, would you be good enough to suggest an idea or two? Vernon's notion is that there should be white mice on the organ"—here they stopped on the hill to laugh, the poet as gaily as the rest—"and that the sight of them should suggest his distant home to the Italian youth and draw tears whenever he looks at them; but his difficulty—I mean Vernon's difficulty—is that he don't know and can't find out whether white mice are native products of Italy. Do either of you happen to know?"

Though Mr. Felspar addressed both the young ladies, he looked towards Ella—indeed it would almost seem, since he had never shown such high spirits before, that it was she who had inspired them—and therefore she felt called upon to reply.

"I don't know about white mice," she said; "but if I had to write a poem on such a subject—which would be a task, however, utterly beyond my powers—I should bring the boy into some such scene as this, which would remind him ever so slightly of his own mountains and blue skies."

"On the contrary," said Felspar, "you should make him feel the contrast as strongly as possible. My dear Vernon, take him into Lincolnshire, where it's all flat, and make him cry, because he has no hills to climb; because he gets beef and beer given him

instead of macaroni and sour wine; because he is not devoured in this country by insects that rhyme with mice; because now and then he sees a silver coin, which I am sure he never did in Italy."

"Miss Josceline is quite right," said Vernon, interrupting this rhodomontade, "and I am much obliged to her for her suggestion."

"Perhaps she could find you a rhyme for exile," observed Anastasia, cynically; for she felt that she was no longer the first fiddle—a position which, as the only young unmarried lady in the hotel, she had hitherto enjoyed in relation to these two young men. Her remark fell flat—everyone knows the effect of the reproduction of a worn-out jest—and had a sobering influence upon the little company. Presently Ella dropped a pencil out of her drawing-case, and, Vernon helping her to find it, the two fell a few paces behind the other couple.

"I hope, Miss Josceline," he said, "you don't think I do my work, poor as it is, quite so mechanically as Felspar would have you believe."

"Indeed I don't," she said, good-naturedly. "I quite understand Mr. Felspar's fun. I know, when he is serious, that he is a great admirer of your talents."

"Oh, as to that, I have next to none," he answered; "it is Felspar's way to speak more highly of his friends than they deserve, as compensation, I suppose, for his modesty as regards himself. He calls himself a portrait-painter, in which line he is, indeed, best known, but he has a keen eye for the beauties of a landscape and a cunning hand for their reproduction. You must see his drawings—which are chiefly

taken from the neighbourhood—at our lodgings. They are really worth a visit.”

“And is there no chance of our hearing some original readings from some one else?” Ella inquired, slily.

“No, indeed,” replied the other, assuringly; “there is not the least danger of such an infliction.”

“I did not mean that at all,” said Ella, earnestly; “you did not think I could be so rude, I hope. Indeed I should like to hear or read your poems.”

“You are very kind to say so. The public, I am sorry to say, are not so civil.”

“But it must be very interesting work writing stories and poems, and very pleasant to see them afterwards in print. You smile—you are thinking that women have a great deal of vanity.”

“Not at all; in that respect we men—those who are authors at least—are not one whit behind the ladies. I was smiling, because, though as you say, it is very pleasant to appear in print, my productions do not always meet with that good fortune. They are sometimes ‘declined with thanks’ by wicked editors.”

“That must be very sad; what do you do then?”

“I smoke my pipe and think how unappreciated Keats was, and flatter myself mine is a parallel case. Then, like Bruce’s spider, I try again.”

“And, like him, you will at last succeed,” said Ella, confidently; “when merit joins hands with perseverance success is certain.”

“That’s not in the copybooks,” answered Vernon, smiling; “though it sounds a little like it.” Then, with a sudden change of manner, he added, “It is, however, the honest utterance of a kind heart, and I

do assure you, Miss Josceline, it has not been spoken in vain; encouragement, and from such lips, to a budding author is like the sunshine."

"Dear me, what is the matter yonder?" interrupted Ella. She was not unwilling to escape replying to a compliment so warmly worded (though, fortunately, he had dropped his voice a little, so that it was possible for her to ignore it), and there was really some excuse for her exclamation of astonishment. Above them stood a group of people consisting of her father and Mrs. Jennynge with the walkers—who had joined them where the carriage road ceased—conversing and gesticulating in great excitement; and in the centre of them, and evidently the cause of their interruption, towered the well-known but unexpected form of Mrs. Armytage.

For the second time in the history of the Danecliff an enemy had taken possession of the hill.

CHAPTER XI.

THE PICNIC.

It had been a subject of surprise to the whole party, as they were toiling up the steep, that the men who had been sent ahead to set forth the feast upon the summit had not been visible; but the explanation of it was now afforded. Just below the summit was a deep trench, dug by the Danes, in which, sheltered from the breeze, had grown up a little copse; and here, accompanied by her somewhat unwilling ally, the Professor, Mrs. Armytage had lain or sat in ambush, and falling upon the men in charge of the pro-

visions, had compelled them to set them down in the hollow.

"Lay the cloth here, John," she had said, imperatively, "where we shall be out of the wind. As for sitting on the top of that hill, in my present state of health, I should as soon think of flying."

John might have thought of flying, and indeed he did, but not for a moment did he think of disobeying Mrs. Armytage's behest, and the cloth was laid accordingly.

"It is rather a likely place for *Ophidia*," the Professor had murmured, but so gently that the remonstrance had been not only ineffectual, but misconceived; his lady had imagined that he was referring to the trench as being the probable habitat of some species of butterfly.

"It is every way the most convenient spot," she said, "and nobody but an idiot would have fixed upon any other."

The idiot, of course, was Mrs. Jennynge; and the counter-ordering of that lady's arrangements was, in fact, the convenience Mrs. Armytage had in her mind.

"They'll feel a little disappointed if they want a view," hazarded the Professor, looking round upon the position, which was in fact a dry ditch; "won't they?"

"Let'em," was the laconic reply.

The frame of mind of his good lady was indeed far from conciliatory; she had not forgotten that terrible scramble up the cliffs of Wychett Cove, and the loss of her dinner at the *table-d'hôte*, not to mention the physical ailments her fatigues had induced. These latter, however, it must be confessed, she had given out to be worse than they really were; she had made

a shrewd guess at the state of affairs in her absence; that something like rebellion might be fermenting among her subjects, and she had resolved to recover her supremacy by a *coup d'état*. Unperceived by the rest of the household, she had stolen up with the Professor early in the morning to her place of ambush, and felt herself mistress of the situation and of her enemies.

The astonishment and chagrin of Mrs. Jennynge, on finding Mrs. Armytage in possession of the camp, was so excessive that she actually forgot to inquire after her rival's health. Environed, as she felt herself to be, by allies, and conscious of the presence of Mr. Josceline, she made for once a resolute stand against the common tyrant.

"Indeed, Mrs. Armytage, we have all set our hearts upon being on the very top of the hill."

"I don't know as to that," was the grim reply; "but I know who has set her heart upon being at the top of the tree. I am sure this is a much pleasanter spot. However, the point is," concluded Mrs. Armytage, more mildly, perceiving public feeling to be against her proposition, "am I, as an invalid, to be asked to sacrifice my health, perhaps my life, to a mere caprice? Of course I am not. We can picnic here in the shelter, and then any one that likes to climb up higher afterwards can do so." Then, arranging her garments with the decent dignity of a female Cæsar, she plumped herself down opposite a pigeon pie.

In a dispute there is nothing like action; passion is not to be compared to it for one moment; and the spectacle of Mrs. Armytage, seated, and evidently about to begin operations on the provisions, decided

the waverers, who were also eager for lunch, in her favour. Mrs. Jennynge, feeling that she had lost the battle, relieved her feelings by making an apology to Mr. Josceline, in whispered tones, for the behaviour of her enemy.

"All of us at the *Ultramarine* are used to Mrs. Armytage's ways," she said; "but to a stranger they must appear very extraordinary."

Mr. Josceline answered with a smile, which also did duty for the acceptance of the offer of a seat tolerably clear of brambles, which Mrs. Armytage had made him by her side. Mrs. Jennynge promptly took up her position on the other side of him—for was it not her duty to protect him against that "terrible woman" all she could?—and the rest of the company arranged themselves mechanically, after much the same manner as they sat at the *table-d'hôte*; only they had no chairs, which to some of them made a considerable difference.

"I call it most idiotic," murmured Mr. Aird, "this coming up a hill in the heat to graze, instead of taking our luncheon comfortably."

"Still, you have an advantage over some of us," observed Mrs. Wallace, laughing, and with a glance at the old Indian's spare figure; "you can sit down on a flat place."

"Yes, but if there's no flat place? There are nettles here, and roots, and sharp things," he answered, testily. "One needs to be a camp-stool, and fold up, to accommodate oneself to such circumstances."

"At all events, it's much better than it would be at the top of the hill," argued Mrs. Armytage.

"You mean it would be worse there than here, ma'am? I deny it. It's hotter here than it was at Bundelcumbad."

"I thought Bundelcumbad was such a nice place," returned the lady, sarcastically; "you always say it was so much nicer than any place in England."

"I only said so of its society, madam. There, if I haven't been sitting on a flint stone, edgeways!"

"Which accounts for the sharpness of your rejoinder," observed Vernon. "How do you know that the Professor will not discover it to be an ancient flint instrument—it's just the place for it—showing unmistakably the action of fire?"

"It's just the place for *that*," grumbled Mr. Aird. "There's not a breath of air. Phew!" and he wiped his forehead with a magnificent bandanna.

"It always struck me," said the Professor, "that the ancient Romans, taking their meals, as they did, supine, and resting on one elbow, must have suffered a good deal from dyspepsia."

"Which should make us forgive them much," remarked Vernon. "For the heinous crime of having invented the Latin language, for one thing. What do you say, Davey?"

"I like it," answered the boy; "I think it's capital."

"Davey has not begun Latin yet," said Mr. Aird, hastily: "that will all come in due time; he thought you referred to the picnic. So you like it, do you, my child?" he continued, softly. "The pure air and the sunshine, eh? Yes; it's very nice."

"He said there was no air a moment ago," muttered Mrs. Armytage, scornfully. "He sees everything through that child's eyes."

"A very rose-coloured medium, at all events," observed Mr. Josceline, who perceived that Mr. Aird had overheard her; "I wish I saw everything through *my* child's eyes."

"Only Miss Josceline's are not rose-coloured," observed Felspar, smiling. "I beg her pardon, but, as a painter and on a question of tint, I must be allowed to express that opinion."

"If Felspar is so brilliant after one glass of champagne, what will he be when he has finished lunch?" remarked Vernon, drily. "One moment, Miss Josceline; don't move, I beg."

He stooped forward, and, seizing something which she had not noticed on her foot, threw it into the air and out of sight.

"Lor! what was that? A bramble—a 'follower,' as we call it in Devonshire!" exclaimed Mrs. Wallace, to whose tongue the unaccustomed champagne had perhaps given some fillip. "Well; I am sure I don't wonder at its having occurred to *her*. In my country it's thought to be an omen of good fortune, or what young ladies think to be so."

"That last limitation of your wife's is not very complimentary to you, Wallace," observed Mr. Aird, whose son's enjoyment of the feast had put in high good humour.

"But I don't believe it was a follower, as you call it, at all," observed Miss Jennynge; "I believe it was a snake."

"A snake!" exclaimed Mr. Aird, with horror, jumping to his feet and clasping his boy in his arms.

"No, no; it was only a blindworm," said Mr. Vernon. "I threw it away because I thought it might

frighten the ladies. My dear Aird, one would really think it had been a boa constrictor."

"I *said* it was a likely spot for *Ophidia*," remarked the Professor, quietly. "If any one gets bitten, I should like to see the effect of *Curare*. I've got a little bottle of it at the hotel."

"Come along, Davey; I'll take your plate and things to the top of the hill!" exclaimed Mr. Aird, suiting the action to the word. "If the Professor likes to sacrifice himself in the cause of science, let him; *you* shall not be its victim."

"Did you ever see any one behave so ridiculously?" observed Mrs. Armytage to Mr. Josceline.

"Well really, madam, I don't know," returned that gentleman; "if there are snakes about, I don't consider them a good substitute, even at a picnic, for soup or fish. What do you say, Mr. Felspar?"

"I think we had better go," said Felspar, decisively.

"I shall stay where I am," said Mrs. Armytage, with equal firmness.

There was a moment of general hesitation; the influence of authority was very great, but in the end that of fear prevailed. In five minutes the whole party had shifted their quarters to the summit of the Danecliff, except the Professor and his wife. That lady had made a great mistake in putting her supremacy to a test so crucial, but, having made it, she stuck to her colours: to have gone with the rest—to sink from generalissimo to camp follower—would have been humiliation indeed.

"I am really very sorry," said Ella, "that Mrs.

Armytage should have been left behind; it seems like deserting her."

"She is not 'left out in the cold,' at all events," observed Mr. Aird. "Gad! one couldn't breathe down there."

"She thoroughly deserves it for her obstinacy," remarked Mrs. Jennynge, uncompromisingly. "She was really afraid of snakes, for I saw her tuck her feet up and sitting all in a hunch as we came away: only she wouldn't own that she was wrong in having counter-ordered my directions. I confess I am only sorry for the poor Professor."

"Oh, *he* won't hurt," said Mr. Felspar, reassuringly. "He will adopt some scientific means of defence against reptiles; set fire to the grass all round him, probably."

"That will be nice for Mrs. Armytage," remarked Miss Jennynge, acidly.

"And will make it ever so much warmer," put in Mr. Aird.

"There will be salamanders as well as snakes there presently," suggested Felspar.

I am afraid there was a great deal of laughter at the dethroned lady's expense, and very little sympathy expressed for her except by Ella, who again said, "I am very sorry."

There was no doubt that the change of locality was a great improvement. The view was magnificent; and after the viands were disposed of, the two young ladies produced their sketch-books, and, under Mr. Felspar's direction, proceeded to transfer the coast-guard station to paper. No doubt it was because Ella was but a beginner that he gave so much more of his

attention to her work than to that of her fair companion; but, though he encouraged her, he was very far from flattering her performance.

"You will want a good deal of teaching," he said; at which Miss Jennynge threw up her head like a horse champing (though, of course, without so much noise), and remarked satirically: "I am sure she will have a very attentive tutor."

"I am glad to have so good a character from my last place," rejoined Felspar, drily. "But you must not imagine, Miss Jennynge, that you are in need of no further instruction."

"You are very complimentary, I'm sure, sir," returned the young lady, in that incisive tone which in the female indicates the presence of "temper."

"Indeed, I only meant that my poor services would be always at your disposal," said Felspar, in conciliation. But poor Ella felt very uncomfortable at this exhibition of feeling on the part of her young friend, and much hotter even than she had been in the fosse. It could not be that Miss Jennynge was seriously jealous of the painter's attention to her new acquaintance, since she herself thought as little of painters (matrimonially speaking) as of glaziers; but she had inherited from her mother an extreme objection to playing, in any orchestra whatsoever, the second fiddle. She had grown so stiff and cold that it needed an artistic touch on the part of Mr. Felspar to what he pleasantly termed "restore animation." "It seems to me, Miss Jennynge," he said, with a critical eye upon her landscape, "that you are best in distance."

Ella, who noticed the double sense of the compliment, grew hotter than ever; partly with annoyance

at Mr. Felspar, partly with apprehension of the effects of such a remark upon her fellow-pupil. She did not take into account the force of the vanity of art combined with that of nature—the weight of Pelion piled on Ossa.

“Do you really think so?” said Anastasia, with a pleased purr. “Singularly enough, Miss Josceline made a similar remark upon my drawing this very morning.”

“That shows she has good judgment, though she is deficient in perspective,” said Felspar, coolly. “Her weak point is your strong one. You young ladies will never be rivals in landscape drawing.”

“That is quite true,” said Ella, laughing, “though I don’t think Miss Jennynge will thank you for such a superfluous piece of consolation.”

“I am sure,” said the delineator of “distance,” graciously, “that after a lesson or two—that is, I mean when you have enjoyed the same advantages as myself—you will be quite as clever at it, except, perhaps, as to the sky line, as I am.”

“Yes; you are not good at sky line, Miss Josceline,” said Felspar, gravely, “but you will do very well at figure drawing. Those little people in the foreground are first-rate. You must go in for that; we’ll get some noble model to draw from. There’s the Professor yonder, come up from the ditch for a breath of fresh air: draw *him*.”

“By-the-bye, where’s Mr. Vernon?” exclaimed Miss Jennynge.

“I’ll tell him you said ‘by-the-bye,’” said Felspar, “in connection with ‘a noble model.’ I don’t know anything more likely to please him. He is very proud of his figure, I can tell you.”

"You have not, however, told us what has become of him," said Ella, anxiously, her quick ear perceiving at once the difference between badinage and evasion. "I noticed he was looking very pale just now; is he unwell?"

"No, no; that is, he is not quite well. The heat of the fosse, I fancy, affected him."

"You are deceiving us, Mr. Felspar," said Ella, putting down her sketch-book; "it was not the heat. I suspected it from the very first, though he concealed it so courageously. That was an adder he took up, and it has bitten him."

"Oh, la; I hope not!" exclaimed Miss Jennynge, with a pretty little shudder.

"Well, yes; it *was* an adder," said Felspar, reluctantly; "I knew it at the time, but he particularly told me to say nothing about it; and if I had not insisted upon his going to the doctor's to be looked to, he would have been here now. Old Cooper has set him to rights by this time, you may depend upon it. He will be dreadfully annoyed if any fuss is made."

But Ella had already risen. "Papa," she exclaimed, "Mr. Vernon has been bitten by the adder that he took off my boot, and has gone home ill!"

At this, Mr. Josceline, who was paying his attentions to Mrs. Jennynge, withdrew them, though scarcely with such promptitude as the occasion would seem to demand.

"Dear me, Ella; you don't say so?"

"How shocking!" ejaculated Mrs. Jennynge; "why, the piece will have to be cut out, and then burnt with a hot iron, won't it?"

"It would be no use burning the piece," said Felspar, grimly.

"How unfeeling you are, Mr. Felspar!" cried Miss Jennynge, reprovngly. She did not understand that it was disgust at the selfishness of her mother's remark, not want of sympathy with his friend, that had evoked his scorn.

"But if something of that kind is not done," pursued the old lady, "he'll go mad, won't he?"

"Yes," said Felspar; "when he comes to the *table-d'hôte* and barks, it will be a sign that he is dangerous."

"Yes, yes; I see all that," said Mr. Josceline, to whom his daughter had meantime been speaking in low but earnest tones: "of course, he was very kind; but I'm hanged if I can see how I can help him, unless I suck the place, like Queen Eleanor."

"I assure you it's quite unnecessary that you should leave us," said Mrs. Jennynge, annoyed at the prospect of losing her cavalier.

"If you don't go, papa," whispered Ella into her father's astonished ear, "I shall go myself."

For one instant a frown like night came over Mr. Josceline's face. Then he answered lightly, "Very well, dear; since you think it is the right thing to do, I'll go at once."

And he went.

"I hope no one else will go," said Felspar, quietly, "because I know it will annoy Vernon. If it had not been for that, I should myself, I hope, have been the first to go."

He said this in so low a tone that it would almost seem to be intended for Ella's ear rather than for a

public apology for his conduct, then added cheerfully, "Come, let us go on with our drawing-lesson."

Miss Jennynge dutifully resumed her sketchbook, but Ella drew no more: she said her fingers shook, which, indeed, they did (though not from cold), as Felspar perceived. He thought some people—those who got bitten by snakes, for instance—had great luck. Presently, seeing Ella unoccupied, little Davey stole down to her from his father's side, and slipped his hand into hers.

"Papa says I must not go to Mr. Vernon," he whispered, "because Mrs. Jennynge says he'll bite. But I don't think he'd bite *me*. I'm very sorry he's hurt; ain't you?"

Ella did not answer him directly; but she put her arm round his neck and kissed him. "You are a good, dear child," she said. Felspar, who saw the action, though he did not hear the words, thought that some boys, too, had great luck.

Then after an hour or so, dashed with melancholy caused by Vernon's misfortune, and which, after the fun of the picnic, seemed somewhat of the nature of a bathos, the party returned to the hotel, whither the Professor and his wife had already preceded them.

CHAPTER XII.

A COUPLE OF PATIENTS.

DR. COOPER'S house, though situated in the High Street of Wallington, was, to some eyes that from time to time beheld it, quite an ideal place of residence. It was small and low, but eminently comfortable, and,

being of ancient red brick and overgrown with creepers, had a most picturesque appearance. The two bow windows of what the Doctor called his parlour and his study—which were also his dining-room and drawing-room—looked out upon an old-fashioned flower-garden, which, all the summer through, smelt more deliciously than the finest scent-shop in Bond Street. At one end of it was a sort of temple, set on a little hill, dedicated to the divine weed, where after his day's work was done, the good Esculapius would sit and smoke, with his eyes on the Ocean and his thoughts on the Infinite—or sometimes only on his longest cases. His best cures, he was wont to say, were wrought out in this place of retirement. His visits to patients were brief, and his way with them so prompt and decisive that, to strangers, and especially to those who had little to do with them, he appeared curt and careless; whereas he was, in fact, the most painstaking of physicians. How he lived—though it was in homely fashion—was a wonder to many, for his practice lay chiefly among the poor, to whom he was known at least as much as an almsgiver as a medical adviser. When remonstrated with by his friends upon a charity so out of all proportion to his means, he would argue that he gave nothing but professional assistance; “it is not the drugs from my dispensary,” he would say, “of which the good people are in need, but beef from my larder and soup from my kitchen; it is no use my ordering them port wine, don't you see, unless I send them a bottle.”

I sometimes think that in heaven there will be a particularly pleasant spot set aside for good doctors; and, if I am right, John Cooper of Wallington will

have one of the snugest corners there. On earth, from the circumstance of his blunt manners and the use of a strong provincial dialect, he was not appreciated generally by the upper classes until they had found the value of his services. And he was so absurdly conscientious that, if they only fancied they needed them, he was wont to tell them so. Otherwise he would have made a much better income out of society generally, and of the hotel company in particular, among whom there were often hypochondriacs, and those professional invalids who to the doctor are what litigious people are to the lawyer. Moreover, when called in to a serious case, but one in which he knew medicine would not avail, instead of trying interesting experiments, which expand the purse if not the mind, he would frankly say, "I can do nothing for you." Such a case he had had under his charge for four-and-twenty hours quite recently; and his payment—a voluntary one—had been unusually large; viz. a five-pound note and this remark, delivered with a sigh, "Dr. Cooper, you are an honest man, I fear."

This was true, yet the doctor had his weaknesses. He was an amateur mathematician, and had constructed a system of logarithms, which did not take much more than double the time for computation than was expended in the usual method; he had even the reputation of "corresponding with Le Verrier," though his enemies asserted that the correspondence had consisted in his having addressed one letter to the astronomer to which the latter had not replied.

On the day of the picnic the Doctor was enjoying an after-dinner pipe in his bower when he beheld

Vernon coming up to him through the garden. The young man often dropped in for a chat in the evening "to suck his brains," as the host averred, and certainly some of the Doctor's experiences had afterwards appeared (well disguised and with his full consent) in print; but the young man was, indeed, a great favourite with him, and brought with him at least as much as he took away. A visit from him so early in the day was, however, unusual; and the Doctor perceived at once that something was amiss, though he affected simplicity.

"Oh, come ye for peace here, or come ye for war?" he quoted, gaily; "do I behold a friend, or a wretch in quest of literary copy?"

"Neither, my good sir; nor yet 'to dance at your bridal,'" replied the young man, concluding the quotation, "though I hope to do that some day." ["An impudent young dog," muttered the Doctor.] "I am come for your professional advice."

"Is it the heartache?"

"No; the fact is I have been bitten in the hand."

"By a dog?" exclaimed the Doctor, speaking quickly, but quietly, and rising from his seat for the first time.

"No; by a viper; it came uninvited to our picnic on the Danecliff, and when I picked it up to throw it away it did this"—and he exhibited his wounded hand, which had already begun to swell.

"Um; fingers were made before forks it is true, but they are not so long. If I had been you, I should have taken that viper up with a salad fork."

"There was no time; the reptile was crawling on a young lady's foot."

The Doctor executed a soft but prolonged whistle. "Then I was right," he said, "as I generally am, in my first diagnosis; both hand *and* heart are affected. You shake your head, which goes for nothing; and you turn very red, which is a most significant symptom. Now let me look at the hand."

They were in the surgery by this time, which was at the back of the house, and the Doctor at once commenced his ministrations.

"If you had been a child, this might have been dangerous," he observed; "but grown-up persons are seldom much hurt by these things. It will cripple you for a day or two for all that, if I am not mistaken."

"Confound it! and I have to write some verses within twenty-four hours for a magazine."

"Dictate 'em to the young lady that bit you—I mean who was the cause of your being bitten. Make 'em very tender; heart, smart; love, dove; mine, thine. That will give you a capital opportunity; and will also put to shame the people who found their arguments against the benevolence of the scheme of creation upon the fact that the viper is harmful and of no use."

"I have found it very useful, professionally," said Vernon, gravely. "As a metaphor for a villain it is invaluable. If he is also a mathematician," he added slyly, "I use a synonym, and call him an adder."

The surgeon laughed, and, as was his custom, so uproariously, that a polite knock at the door escaped the notice of both doctor and patient. The next moment Mr. Josceline entered the room.

"I beg your pardon, Dr. Cooper, but the servant-

girl told me to walk in. I came to inquire after a sick friend, and am delighted to find him laughing, like Mother Hubbard's dog in the ballad."

"It was *my* laugh," said the Doctor, somewhat disconcerted, and conscious, doubtless, that a guffaw was scarcely a professional incident in a surgical operation. "The fact is, our young friend here is a little depressed by his misfortune; thinks a snake-bite likely to produce hydrophobia—now, my good sir," this to Vernon, who was about to enter his protest against so atrocious a misrepresentation, "you mustn't excite yourself, or you'll have lock-jaw."

For a moment Mr. Josceline looked puzzled, but in the next he was in full possession of the state of affairs. The rough humour of the Doctor was as foreign to any mental attribute of his own as were the high spirits of Vernon; but he could understand them both.

"I suppose," he said, in the philosophic tone he could adopt with the same ease as another would use a toothpick, "you find in sickness even more than in health that 'a merry heart goes all the way, while a sad one tires in a mile-a-.'"

"That is certainly my experience, Mr. Josceline," returned the Doctor; for, though he had never spoken to his visitor before, the latter was already known by report to every one in Wallington. "'Tis a light heart that makes the good patient; but I hope our young friend here will not have to draw much upon his resources in the way of liveliness to get over this bout. To the adult, as I was telling him, the bite of the viper is not very formidable."

"I am, nevertheless, greatly obliged to him for

having, to his own damage, rescued my daughter from such a calamity," said Mr. Josceline, warmly. "Without making too much of it, which I am sure he would not wish me to do, I must needs say it was an unselfish act, very promptly and opportunely done. I thank him for it in my daughter's name, as well as my own."

There was little to be found fault with in Mr. Josceline's words, albeit they did not quite give the impression of being extempore, while the manner of speaking them was perfection. But it did not escape Vernon's notice that they were addressed to him somewhat indirectly and in the presence of a third person. To his sensitive mind this seemed to imply that Mr. Josceline was inclined to make the obligation referred to as little private and personal as possible.

"You are quite right, Mr. Josceline," he replied, gravely, "in thinking I did not wish to make much of what I did; nor was there in the service itself anything worthy of remark, since any one in my place must needs have performed it. I hope you will not think it necessary to further allude to it."

"One would really think our young friend was Mithridates, King of Pontus," observed Mr. Josceline, gaily, "so lightly does he seem to hold being poisoned."

"He doesn't make such a fuss about it as Cleopatra, certainly," remarked the Doctor, drily; "but an adder's fang is not to be trifled with, and the sooner he gets home and lies up a bit the better—and you will wear that sling, young man, till further orders."

As Vernon rose to go, "You must give me your

left hand," said Mr. Josceline, kindly, "though you can't give me your right. Both my daughter and I will do ourselves the pleasure of calling on you to-morrow to make inquiries."

A flush of pleasure came over the young man's face in spite of his effort to appear unmoved.

"I am sure that is not necessary, Mr. Josceline," he said, "though such a visit would, indeed, be welcome, however undeserved. There are some of Mr. Felspar's paintings, however, at our lodgings, which, since Miss Josceline is herself an artist, may, perhaps, repay her for her trouble."

The allusion was unfortunate, as we, who are in possession of Mr. Josceline's views of his daughter's taste for art, are well aware; but the man of the world merely smiled acquiescence, and bade adieu to his young acquaintance with much graciousness and warmth. The resentment Vernon had shown in the first instance had, curiously enough, made a favourable impression on Mr. Josceline; he was glad to find that the young fellow had some pride of his own, for he knew it was easier to deal with such a man in relation to his affections (and his admiration of Ella had not escaped her father's eye) than with those who agree with the Scripture that "before honour is humility."

"I hope there is really nothing to fear with regard to Mr. Vernon," said Mr. Josceline, as soon as the patient had left the room.

"I think I may honestly say nothing," replied the Doctor, to whom it seemed natural enough, though kind withal, that the other should have remained behind to ask the question. "It is a great point in his

favour, as you were saying, that he is not of the melancholy sort. Now, I've got a patient—not a hundred miles away—who, if his great toe aches, thinks not only that he is going to die of it, but that the world is going to fall to pieces.”

“His name begins with an E, does it not?” observed Mr. Josceline, smiling.

“Well, yes,” answered the Doctor, somewhat repenting of his particularity, for it was contrary to his habit to eke out his remarks, as only too many doctors do, by illustrations drawn from his own practice; “but how is it possible that you, who are a stranger here, should have guessed that?”

“Oh, I know Mr. Edward, at least by reputation,” said Mr. Josceline. “I notice, by-the-bye, that about here they call him Edwards!”

“Which would drive him frantic if he knew it,” laughed the Doctor; “fortunately, however he never hears what folks say.”

“Just so; he lives the life of a recluse, does he not?”

“Absolutely; he sees no one in the neighbourhood except myself, nor even me save when he imagines himself (which, however, is pretty often) at the point of death. At ordinary times, when I am sent for, I am interviewed by his secretary, who details his highness's symptoms as if they were his own, and I prescribe for them accordingly.”

“Do you not think he is touched in his head?” inquired Mr. Josceline, carelessly.

The Doctor shrugged his shoulders. “As he is a rich man, one must call him ‘peculiar’ or ‘eccentric’; if he were a poor man—well, between ourselves, I

think he would be put into the County Lunatic Asylum."

"It is fortunate for him that he has no relatives to put him in a private madhouse," observed Mr. Josceline, with unwonted grimness.

"That is not *his* opinion," said the Doctor, drily, who, having been betrayed into frankness by the other's seeming acquaintance with the subject in question, now once more seemed inclined to draw in his horns.

"Just so; that he has not been blessed by children seems to him, I dare say, not so much a private calamity," continued the other, "as a public misfortune."

"I see you know all about it," answered the Doctor, in a tone that seemed to imply, "and since you do so, there is nothing more to tell."

"But do you mean to say, Doctor," pursued Mr. Josceline, "that our friend up at the castle yonder"—and he threw his hand out in the direction of Barton—"does actually see no one but his secretary and yourself?"

"No other man, as I believe."

There was a long pause, which the Doctor did not seem at all inclined to break; he felt that he had made a mistake in speaking of the private affairs of a patient, and especially of one who was solicitous to keep them private.

"And does this seclusion apply also, Doctor, to the other sex?"

"To tell you the truth, Mr. Josceline, I don't feel at liberty to give you any more information upon the subject, unless you can assure me that you

have some reason beyond mere curiosity for inquiring into it."

"The question I have just put, Doctor, shall be my last one," returned the other, earnestly; "and I give you my word of honour that, whatever your reply may be, it shall never be repeated to any human being."

"Well, then, there *is* a lady at the castle who enjoys Mr. Edward's complete confidence. I should add," he continued, gravely—for a mocking and contemptuous smile had suddenly distorted Mr. Josceline's aristocratic features—"that not a breath of scandal attaches to Miss Burt's position in that gentleman's household. She is, I am convinced, an excellent good woman, though she has suffered, I have every reason to believe, some severe misfortune, the nature of which I cannot guess, but which, I will venture to assert, has been unmerited."

Mr. Josceline waved his hand in token of assent, but his face darkened, and its expression became curiously hard and set.

"You must excuse my earnestness," continued the Doctor, "but I respect Miss Burt, and appreciate the delicate position in which she is necessarily placed; and as to Mr. Edward himself, I feel that where a man—though it may be through his own fault—has so many circumstances against him, and which tend to foster gossip and scandal, it is one's duty to put him right with others, where one can—— Drink this at once; the whole of it!"

While the Doctor had been speaking he had moved, still keeping his eye fixed on his companion, to a cupboard behind him, from which he produced

a bottle of brandy and a wine-glass, which he filled to the brim.

"Don't speak; that's well; your colour is coming back again."

"I am dying; I suffocate," moaned the other; his lips were blue; his hands were pressed tightly to his side; his face depicted the throes of some inward agony.

"On the contrary, you are getting better."

"If that breast-pang is to come again, I had rather die," murmured Mr. Josceline.

"It will not come again," answered the Doctor, quietly; "at least, not now," he added, with conscientious reluctance. "You have had it before, I conclude?"

Mr. Josceline moved his head in assent. There was a silence for a little, and then the patient began to smile pleasantly, but very feebly, like a wintry sun.

"What poor creatures we are, Doctor, when anything goes wrong with this complicated mechanism of ours! I feel that I have made a most distressing exhibition of myself. The sight of that adder—so near my dear Ella—gave me a turn, and perhaps I came down the hill quicker than was necessary; and, you see, my heart is weak. Pray forgive me."

The Doctor regarded him with gravity. Mr. Josceline reminded him of Lord Chesterfield *in extremis* with his "Give Dayrelles a chair," and his honest nature resented such politeness as out of place.

"It is my duty," said he, earnestly, "to tell you that you will require great care, Mr. Josceline; very great care. I can do little for you; but you must avoid excitement of all kinds, or we shall have a re-

petition of this scene which has distressed you so much."

"It was touch and go, Doctor, was it?" inquired the other, with a seriousness as strangely foreign to the phrase, as the phrase itself was to the speaker's usual manner of expressing himself.

"Yes; if you put it that way, it was almost 'go!'"

"Poor Ella!"

Mr. Josceline's voice was full of pathos. To one who knew him well it was difficult to believe that he could have uttered such words and in such a tone. Presently he spoke again.

"You will say nothing of this unpleasant incident, I feel sure, Doctor; I have never been mistaken yet—to use a phrase from your own profession—in my diagnosis of a gentleman."

"The term is very vague," returned the other, smiling; "but you may trust me so far. The secrets of the consulting-room are as the secrets of the confessional. You must not think because I spoke so openly of Mr. Edward and of Miss Burt (who, indeed, is no patient of mine) that I am given to gossip—I'll just open the window; that's well; now you look yourself again."

For a moment Mr. Josceline had not looked himself, nor anything like it. The Doctor's practised eye had detected certain premonitory symptoms of a second attack; but these, again, had passed away. "Half a glass more of this will do you no harm; unless, indeed, you are unused to alcohol."

"I have drunk like a fish in my time," replied Mr. Josceline, frankly.

"I dare say," was the Doctor's rejoinder, delivered

in so *naïve* a tone, that the patient answered, smiling:—

“You are thinking to yourself that I have probably done everything else, in my time, that I should not have done.”

“It is my impression that you have tried your constitution pretty severely,” answered the Doctor, evasively. “And, I warn you,” he continued, earnestly, “you must try it no more.”

“Indeed, I have no intention, Doctor,” sighed Mr. Josceline; “it is such a mistake that we don’t all begin life at sixty years of age. Then we should be so irreproachable.”

“I don’t agree with you; many would be born misers, for one thing.”

“Let the galled jade wince; that doesn’t touch *me*, I assure you, Doctor, since I was never distinguished as an economist. By-the-bye, that reminds me—what am I indebted to you for saving my life; for I well understand that you have done no less.”

“My dear sir, the glass of brandy you drank, it is true, is very old,” answered the Doctor, gravely; “at the *Ultramarine* you would have given a shilling for it. But I am not licensed to sell spirituous liquors, and, therefore, can charge you nothing.”

“But that is Quixotic,” remonstrated Mr. Josceline; “moreover, if I want a doctor in future, what am I to do?”

“Oh, if you send for me professionally, of which I hope there will be no need, that is another matter. Then it will be ‘Charge, Chester, charge,’ with a vengeance. Good-bye, my dear sir, and take care of yourself.”

"A very serious case, that," murmured the Doctor, when the other had departed. "It must have been no ordinary matter that so moved him; the attack took place, too, when he was apparently quite calm. Sixty years of age? No; he has not seen fifty, and I very much doubt," he added, with a drop in his voice, "if he ever will see it."

CHAPTER XIII.

A SUGGESTION.

THE position of a bore in society is not so fixed as it is commonly supposed to be. He is by no means generally disliked, or it would be impossible that he should be so universally tolerated. The fact is, dull people, of whom there is a fair sprinkling in the world, are not so annoyed by him as they pretend to be, and have, secretly, a fellow-feeling for him. Bores, indeed, remind me of nothing so much as organ-grinders, who, though abused on all hands, are, in fact, looked upon with disfavour by only a few unfortunates with delicate nerves, on whom their grinding has the effect of slow torture. There are some circumstances, however,—when, for example, they are suffering from severe calamities or physical pain,—in which even the most commonplace and conventional of men resent the attentions of a bore as though they were pests; and the same thing takes place with those men of the world who pride themselves most upon their external civility to this class of parasite; when they arehipped and out of sorts their patience gives way, and they can be as rude as anybody—or ruder. Thus it happened to

Mr. Josceline himself, when, on leaving the Doctor's house with his mind full of many things, and none of them pleasant, and with his body by no means in a satisfactory condition, he found himself suddenly in the society of Mrs. Armytage. She had gone into the village to make some little purchases, and was returning to the hotel alone when the good fortune occurred to her of meeting the very companion she most desired.

"Well, this *is* pleasant!" she exclaimed, "and the more so because so unexpected. I do hope you took no hurt, my dear Mr. Josceline, from that imprudent adjournment to the top of the Danecliff. You are not strong, you know, and really you look far from well. I believe you feel a cold coming."

Mr. Josceline felt worse things than colds coming. The warning he had just received had been of a most serious and unmistakable kind, and it was not the first. In spite of himself and of all his usual habits and modes of thought, he had been brought suddenly face to face with a certain ghastly reality which, sooner or later, obtrudes itself on the attention of gentlemen of the highest fashion.

When an earthquake has taken place close to one's feet, and another shock is imminent, the buzzing of a bottle fly in one's ear is of no account; yet, if it settles on one's nose, one must do something. Mr. Josceline made at first some polite and mechanical rejoinder to Mrs. Armytage's tittle-tattle; but her "weak, washy, everlasting flood" of words was, in the end, too much for him.

"Anybody can see you are not well, Mr. Josceline; much more one who, like myself, has some powers of

observation; and who also, I may be allowed to say, takes a personal interest in your welfare. To sit down on the top of that hill, of all places in the world, to dine, was really an act of madness. If you had stopped in the hollow, as I suggested——”

“Do you know what happened, madam, through your choice of that situation?” interrupted Mr. Josceline, gravely. “Mr. Vernon has been bitten by a snake.”

“Dear me! You don’t say so! Why, I heard him with my own ears say it was a blindworm.”

“That was because he did not wish to alarm you ladies; he was bitten very badly, and Dr. Cooper has just dressed the wound.”

“I don’t think much of Dr. Cooper,” replied the lady. “I dare say he has never so much as heard of such a remedy, but a little olive oil, with wool to exclude the air, is a sovereign remedy for snake-bites.”

“Then, for Heaven’s sake, madman, go to Mr. Vernon and tell him so. I think, under the circumstances, he has a right to expect it.”

“Do you really?” replied the lady, doubtfully. “If *you* are not a judge of what is right, dear Mr. Josceline, I don’t know who can be qualified; and though I am scarcely on visiting terms with the young gentleman”—here she drew herself up, as if by that movement she would have indicated her superior position in the social scale—“rather than fall short in such a matter, I will take the oil to him myself.”

“Then you will very literally be a Good Samaritan,” said Mr. Josceline.

He got rid of her with a smile and a bow, and she parted from him with the same symbols of courtesy.

But the one never knew how very near the edge of a volcano she had been treading, while the other was equally unconscious of danger, through having underrated the intelligence, or rather the susceptibilities, of his late companion.

Mrs. Armytage could see when she was not wanted (when she chose to see it) as well as another; and though she had departed upon an errand of charity, her feelings were scarcely in consonance with it. If Mr. Josceline had not been a sprig of nobility, she would have let him know what she thought of his conduct; but, as it was, he hung too high. With the commonalty in almost open revolt against her sway, she could not afford to quarrel with a personage so exalted: and, indeed, in order to show how far from quarrel were her thoughts, she sent Mr. Josceline a present, or rather a token of her solicitude, that very afternoon.

He was in his room alone, having placed his daughter, when he left the Danecliff, in the care of Mrs. Jennynge, who, contrary to Ella's wishes (for she was naturally anxious to hear of Mr. Vernon), had, after their return to the hotel, taken her out for a walk in company with Anastasia; so that he was quite alone when Mrs. Armytage's own maid came in with her mistress's compliments, and one of the very hottest linseed poultices that had ever been seen so far from the fire. The cook, she said, had forgotten to send it on the previous day, but Mrs. Armytage hoped and trusted it would still be found useful.

"You may put it down," was the very mitigated expression of thanks with which Mr. Josceline received it; and, on the handmaiden's departure, I am sorry to

be obliged to add, that, with an ejaculation which nothing but the state of his health could have excused, the invalid dropped it out of window. Nor was even this the worst of it; for Mrs. Armytage's Fido happening to be upon the grass-plot beneath, in search of unconsidered trifles, he snapped the poultice up without having taken the precaution to blow upon it, or having the patience to let it cool, whereupon arose such howls of agony as brought out the whole establishment of the hotel. As the plate, however, had not been thrown out, and poor Fido could not explain the nature of his malady, he was treated for fits.

Under other circumstances, such a catastrophe could not have failed to be agreeable to one with so strong a sense of humour as Mr. Josceline, but that gentleman, as may well be imagined, was in no mood for mirth. Though he was far from thinking with the French nobleman that the Creator would "think twice before d——ing a person of his quality," the Hon. George Emilius Josceline had no vulgar fears of death, but he had fears of what might happen afterwards—to somebody else. The picture of his Ella, friendless, fortuneless, and forlorn, presented itself to his mind in sombre but distinct colours. It had, as we know, occurred to him before, but never with such sharpness of outline. To do him justice, though he entertained some vague thoughts of reparation, he had none of absolution; it did not strike him that by any sacrifice of self at this, the fag end of a wasted existence, he might benefit his own soul. If he was destitute of the religious sense, he was also free from the inconsistent egotism that too often accompanies it. He had lived for Self, it is true, throughout his life;

but, for once, Love had vanquished Self. He was like a man who, conscious that his time is short, but with no anxiety for his spiritual concerns, makes haste to make his will. Only, in his case, though so solicitous to make provision for another, there was nothing to leave; it was, however, possible, if time were given to him, to make, as it were, a deed of gift; to bestow something upon the beloved object in his lifetime that might be of service to her after his own departure. It was no wonder that he was full of thought; and what made the matter still more grave was, that, notwithstanding its pressing character, it was absolutely necessary for him to conceal its urgency from all concerned, and from Ella most of all. If she should once grasp the real condition of affairs, her father well understood that she would be constituting herself the nurse and devoted companion of a sick man; whereas he had quite other views both for her and the patient in question.

After an hour or two of solitude, during which he sat at the open window, gazing out on sky and sea, the beauty of which, perhaps, mingled with his thoughts and influenced them in a manner he little suspected, he arrived at a certain conclusion; not a very good one, nor perhaps, albeit it had paternal love for its basis, even a high-principled one, but, nevertheless, such as seemed to him feasible and sufficient. By the time Ella returned he had, to all outward appearance, recovered himself, as was clear from her at once addressing him with respect to the health of another.

“Well, papa; how is Mr. Vernon? Mrs. Jennynge walks so slowly that I thought we should never have

got home, and all the time I was torturing myself with the notion that he might be very ill."

"No, no; there is very little the matter, though I thought it civil to say we would call and inquire after him to-morrow; a slight swelling of the hand, and a little pain, which the Doctor assures me will abate to-morrow. There was no occasion to distress yourself; I hope you did not evince any impatience of the society of your companions."

"I hope not, indeed, papa; Mrs. Jennynge was very kind to me, though I am not so conceited as to suppose it was for my own sake. You have no idea how she was singing your praises."

"She is a woman of excellent judgment," returned Mr. Josceline, smiling; "and her daughter? Did she join in the chorus?"

"Well, she was not so enthusiastic as her mamma, of course. That would not have been what that lady would have called *comme il faut*, or in accordance with *les convenances*."

It was with a very good-natured laugh that Ella thus alluded to Mrs. Jennynge's weakness for the French tongue, but Mr. Josceline did not echo it; nay, it was even with a slight air of reproof that he replied, "She is a very kindly and well-disposed woman, Ella, and does not presume upon her wealth, as many persons would do in her position. I have reason to believe that she is very rich."

"Indeed!" said Ella, indifferently; "I wonder, then, that the daughter—being such an heiress—should have remained unmarried so long."

"Yes, that is strange, for she is not bad-looking,"

"Her style of dress is a little too fashionable, don't you think, papa?"

"Well, it is, at all events, unsuitable for Wallington Bay. If you could give her a little friendly advice on the matter, it would be a charity. They evidently feel inclined to cultivate our acquaintance, and, though they may not be quite to our own taste, I have lived too long in the world to reject the friendly advances of honest people."

The sentiment, no doubt, was an admirable one, yet somehow in her father's mouth it sounded strange.

"But, my dear papa, I thought to-day you rather discouraged Mrs. Armytage. And though she is rather vulgar, I do believe she is well-meaning."

"No doubt she is, and that is a great misfortune. If such people were not well-meaning they would not be tolerated at all. I wish they would let well alone; she has just sent me a linseed poultice, which Fido has taken internally." And he narrated the incident in a manner that amused Ella exceedingly. "By Jingo," he added, "how Mr. Aird does hate that woman!"

"Yes, I am quite sorry about it; he and Davey joined us when we were out walking, and inveighed against her so that I felt obliged to be her partisan."

"That is a piece of quite unnecessary knight-errantry," observed Mr. Josceline, gravely. "Mr. Aird is a better judge of human nature than you are, my dear. Underneath his somewhat rough exterior, unless I am much mistaken, are a wise head and a warm heart."

"As to the latter, I am quite convinced of it, papa; his devotion to his boy is quite touching."

"Yes, and when such strong affection is manifested for one object, the capabilities of it, at all events, exist for others. His lad is delicate, I fear."

"I am afraid so, papa."

"How came Mr. Aird to join company with you?" inquired Mr. Josceline, after a long silence, during which he appeared deep in thought. "It did not strike me that Mrs. Jennynge was a favourite of his."

"Well, I believe that I was the attraction—that is, of course, to Davey. The little fellow has taken quite a fancy to me, and, seeing me walking with the others, he ran up to us, and his father followed him. The two have only just left us to make inquiries at Clover Cottage."

"And where *is* Clover Cottage?"

"What, have you not been there? That is where Mr. Felspar and Mr. Vernon live."

"No. I saw Mr. Vernon at the Doctor's. I remember now, he told me he lived in lodgings. That must be wretched work in a place like Wallington; but, to be sure, it signifies nothing to a bachelor. The worst of it is that a man of that kind, through ignorance rather than selfishness, often imagines that what is good enough for himself is good enough for his wife."

"But is Mr. Vernon going to be married?"

"I am sure I don't know; I am only speaking in general terms, though, by-the-bye, I think his friend Felspar, who seems to be situated in much the same position, has an eye to Miss Jennynge. In that case, however, supposing you are right about her being an heiress, there is nothing to be said, as she will have enough for two."

"I think, dear papa, your sagacity is for once at fault," said Ella, quietly. "From what I have seen of Mr. Felspar, I judge him to have too much pride to be dependent upon his wife."

"Then all I can say is, it is false pride," returned Mr. Josceline, dogmatically. "As to his own ideas upon the matter, they don't concern me in the least; but I should be sorry, my dear Ella, if you were to be misled by conventional views upon this subject. They proceed, in the first place, from the vulgar supposition that money is everything, and that there is no equivalent for it, whereas there are a great many equivalents. For example, if Mr. Felspar is a man of genius, he would give as much as he got, even though he married an heiress or even a millionairess."

"I quite agree with you there, papa, I'm sure."

"Of course you do; everybody with common sense must do so. Similarly, a man of rank but of small means is not to be accused of greed if, as the phrase goes, he 'marries money.' What he needs, it is true, his wife is possessed of; but also, if she is not of such good family, *vice versâ*. And it is the same with a young lady, whether of birth or beauty (and, of course, this is still more the case when she is possessed of both), who marries a rich man older than herself. The disparity in years is fully made up to her by the advantages of his social position, and indeed, taking marriages all round, I am inclined to think that these are the happiest of all unions."

It was not likely that Ella would have expressed any view of her own in antagonism to her father's experience; but at this juncture the gong gave note of the preparation for the *table d'hôte*, and it is certain

she felt a sense of relief in obeying its summons, and escaping from the further development of his social philosophy. It was not only that his treating of such topics was a thing new and strange, but his tone and manner had an earnestness altogether foreign to his character, and such as gave the thing discoursed of a personal application which embarrassed her, she knew not why.

CHAPTER XIV.

A CONFESSION.

WHY Clover Cottage was so called had remained a mystery even to the oldest inhabitants of Wallington until Mr. Felspar had discovered it. The Dryasdusts, of course, would have held that, it being the most ancient dwelling-house in the place, it had originally stood in the fields and been surrounded by the herb in question. But the painter stoutly held that the herb had nothing to do with it, and that the name arose from an antique song of praise sung by generation after generation of grateful lodgers who had lived under that hospitable roof in clover. It was incontestable that the Dame was a good and liberal housewife, whatever her foremothers may have been before her, and she had a weakness for youthful lodgers of the male sex.

There is something, I cannot tell what it may be,
About good-looking gentlemen aged twenty-three,
Which affects female hearts in no common degree;
Ugly or pretty, stupid or witty,
Young or old, they experience in country or city
What is clearly not love, yet it's warmer than pity.

And this was the case with Mrs. Gammer, who, though Mrs. but by courtesy, was of the mature age of sixty-five, and might be supposed (by those ignorant of the subject) to have survived the tender passion. If she had had any professional rivals in the place—which she had not, for Clover Cottage was the only house that accommodated visitors—they might justly have complained that she spoilt her lodgers, and the market; and, indeed, anything in stronger contrast to the ordinary ways of landladies than *her* ways could not be imagined. Her first solicitude was to make her guests comfortable; the last idea to enter her head (indeed it never got there) would have been to take advantage of their confidence. In her personal appearance nature had made some mistakes: she should obviously have been plump and buxom and typical of plenty; whereas she was tall and spare. Her hair should have been white but plentiful, as befits elderly persons who practise philanthropy; whereas doubts were entertained (and even expressed) by her enemies whether she had any hair at all. She had, indeed, a substitute for it in a front of brown curls; but these were of such an amazing size and uncompromising rigidity, that they imposed upon no one. They no more resembled real ringlets than the stone peaches on the mantelpiece in her private parlour resembled genuine wall-fruit.

Mr. Michael Felspar had lodged with this lady for three summers; during the first she had called him "Mr. Felspar," during the second he had been "Mr. Michael," and now he was "Mr. Mike." Mr. Vernon had only been with her that spring; but, being a friend of Mr. Felspar's, Mrs. Gammer had grown more familiar with him earlier, and he was already "Mr. Walter."

One would have almost thought, to have heard them talking together, that they were two brothers and that she was their mother; and yet her familiarity was not of the sort that breeds contempt. She never forgot she was their landlady. Some very great ladies have a similar faculty of playing two *rôles* at once.

When Vernon came home with his arm in a sling, he knew better than to talk to this good lady of adders; she was one of those simple creatures who confuse these reptiles with rattlesnakes, and believe that a cat, if she catches you asleep, will suck your breath.

"Good gracious, Mr. Walter, what on earth have happened?" Then, with a sudden change from curiosity to presentiment, "I'll lay my life it's a hornet."

"You are always right, Mrs. Gammer," was his cheerful reply. "My head's in a buzz as though I were still in the thick of them; so the Doctor has recommended me to lie down."

"But hornets don't buzz, Mr. Walter."

The man of letters was unacquainted with this fact of natural history; a little more experience in his craft would have taught him never to commence a fiction of a technical kind without consulting an expert. He was so young that his conscience even pricked him for deceiving a woman that had a kindness for him, and his face betrayed it.

"Lord a mercy, don't ye tell me it's a mad dog!" continued the old lady, clasping her skinny, but useful fingers.

For a single instant he felt a strong desire to bark and frisk upon the doorstep, but humanity asserted itself; he told her all like a man, with the assurance, however, that Dr. Cooper, whom she believed to be

as infallible as the Pope, thought nothing of it. "If my blood had been in a bad state with the living at the hotel, for instance" (this really was a pretty touch of his art), "I should have been ill for a week; but, as I get nothing but what is wholesome at Clover Cottage, there is nothing to be apprehended. All that is recommended to me is quiet and milk arrowroot."

By the happy invention of this prescription, the patient procured the first panacea at once; for Mrs. Gammer left him to his own devices while she hurried off to get ready the second, for the preparation of which she flattered herself, as he well knew, she had a peculiar gift.

When Mrs. Armytage in due course arrived with her olive oil and wool, the invalid, to her great indignation, was denied to her. "He had already taken," said Mrs. Gammer, "what Dr. Cooper had ordered him, and was forbidden to receive company."

"But he will see *me*?" insisted Mrs. Armytage.

"Indeed, ma'am, it is impossible," was the dry rejoinder. "Mr. Walter is abed."

It must be understood, as some mitigation of this pious fraud, that in the meanwhile Mrs. Gammer had learnt that her young favourite's ailment had been indirectly caused by Mrs. Armytage herself, and that she thought herself justified in using any means for excluding from his presence his would-have-been assassin. Vernon was not in bed, but in the sitting-room, smoking a pipe and composing his bespoken poem upon the "Italian Organ Boy." It was a room of considerable size if you counted in its large bow window, and, though bare of furniture, was full of miscellaneous objects connected with literature and

art. Two immense tobacco jars, with sealskin and india-rubber pouches in profusion; half-a-dozen packs of cards not over clean; wax matches everywhere, not excepting on the carpet; yesterday's "Times," and several copies of the "Mayfair Keepsake," some of them with illustrations not to be found in the originals; and a silver tankard with a glass bottom. These were common to the two tenants of the apartment; but on the table of each were the tools of their respective trades; on the one, palettes, pencils, and paint-boxes; on the other, pens (some gnawed to the quick in the agonies of composition), Shelley, Keats, and a rhyming dictionary. On the wall, some bookshelves pretty well filled, and a few unframed sketches, full of freshness and vigour, redeemed this somewhat Bohemian state of affairs.

Felspar, who had come home to console the invalid, was not, as usual, at his work, but sitting with his chair atilt and his arms at the back of his head, which was his attitude of reflection. His eyes were fixed on his friend with a certain tender gravity, evoked perhaps by the contemplation of the process of inspiration.

"Look here, old fellow," he said presently; "you don't seem to get on very well with that left hand of yours. Can't I write the thing out for you?"

"Well; I was thinking of asking you, but it seemed too like dictation."

Felspar shut his eyes and laughed to himself, as his custom was when greatly tickled. "My dear Vernon," he said, "you have considerable humour; but, like Liston, you imagine yourself to be a serious being. Why will you persist in writing poetry?"

"I do but sing because I must,
And pipe but as the linnets sing,"

was the other's modest reply. "Are you ready? Is your pen full of ink? The least hitch on your part may be as fatal as the call of the tax-gatherer was to Coleridge's *Kubla Khan*."

"Are you so very full of the god?"

"Brimming."

"Stop a bit, man; what's the title? The 'Italian Boy' reminds one of Burke and Hare. What do you think of the 'Grinder'? The thing is full of fun, of course."

"It's nothing of the kind, sir. On the contrary, it's most uncommonly pathetic. The youth is an exile——"

"Oh, yes; I remember," said Felspar, "and he compares British with Italian scenery."

"Well, yes; I confess I think that view of his position a happy one."

"It was Miss Josceline's," observed Felspar, quietly.

"Yes; but she did not reserve the copyright, I believe;" he said this a little curtly; then adding with mock gaiety, "Be so good as to favour me with your attention, Mr. Amanuensis," he began to walk rapidly up and down the room dictating as he did so:—

Your sun is bright, your skies are blue
The shadows on your hills are few;
But yet I miss the golden noon
And yet the soft Italian hue.

For what I know, your mountain lines
Are grand and tall as Apennines;
But I do long for their clear heights
And their long rows of purple vines.

Your woods for bird may wave as free,
Your flowers as fair may smile for bee;
But, ah, I pine for leaf and bloom
That blows and beams athwart the sea.

"Is that all?" inquired Felspar.

"Well; the editor only wanted three verses; and one only gets the same money for four, you see."

"Very good, my dear Vernon; you will succeed in literature."

"You really like the little poem, do you, then?" replied the other eagerly, with an author's blush.

"I did not say so. I only said you would succeed in your profession because you are so economical of your ideas. It is a fine thing not to spoil the market. Half a guinea for three verses is three-and-sixpence a verse, whereas half-a-guinea for four verses——"

"Is beyond your powers of calculation," put in Vernon, laughing.

"I could do it if you gave me time," said Felspar, confidently.

"It would be a sum in very long division, then. The idea of an artist attempting mathematics!"

"And this is because I have not praised his poem!" exclaimed Felspar, appealing through the open window to universal nature. "Oh, *irritabile genus!* My dear Vernon, the lines are really good. There is not, however, quite enough trellis work for the greenery; one sees the sun through it too much."

"Ah! there I differ from you; I should say, now, though far from obscure, if anything it was too suggestive."

Felspar tossed his tawny hair, and laughed loud

and long. "To please a poet the praise must be 'thick and slab,' indeed, like witches' soup," he said.

"You are quite right, my dear Felspar, and I am a vain fool," answered Vernon, penitently. "But I confess I was rather sweet upon those verses; I thought of them as I came down from the Danecliff. They seemed to come much more naturally than verses for the *Keepsake* generally do."

"And yet you were going to the Doctor's to be treated for snake-bite!" said Felspar, gravely.

"Yes; if the case ends fatally," answered the other, smiling; "the poem will have quite a tragic interest, like the wild swan's Death Hymn. You don't think the parallel very complete?"

"You are much more like a wild swan than a tame one, at all events," admitted Felspar.

"And yet do you know, old fellow," said Vernon, softly, "I don't feel so wild as I did. I have a sensation—not an unpleasant one, but very sobering—of having had my wings clipped."

"Indeed!" answered Felspar, with an affectation of indifference which the other's keen sense of observation would easily have detected had not his mind been monopolised by something else; "and by whom?"

"By Cupid's shears. Of course it sounds ridiculous that in such a very little time and on so slight an acquaintance——"

"The operation seldom takes very long," put in Felspar, with a quiet smile.

"That is true; I should not have spoken about it, however, at all events not yet, but for that promise we made to one another—just as two people agree that

whoever should die first shall tell the other all about it, you know."

"Which they never do," interrupted Felspar.

"No; because they can't keep their promise; but about love you can, you see. Whichever of us was first 'smitten' was to tell the other, you remember, how it felt."

"To be sure; I recollect," answered the other, in a low, mechanical tone; "and how *does* it feel?"

"It feels," said Vernon, taking his pipe from his mouth and looking out on the horizon, "like a metamorphosis; as though, having been little better than a brute, I was changed into a man. It feels, though I know I am but dreaming, that I have something now to work for and to live for which is not myself. Number one has vanished, and number two has become the unit of existence. It feels as though a word of praise from her I love would outweigh all the 'hebdomadal immortality,' as you once called it, that was ever conferred by the critics of the *Parthenon*."

And here he stopped and pulled softly at his pipe, which would otherwise have expired through his eloquence. Felspar had taken up a sketch-book and was at work with his pencil, but he kept his face to his friend. "And why should you say, 'I know I am but dreaming'?" he inquired.

"Because I know it is so. I am penniless as compared with her, and I have not the gift of accumulation, nor even of taking care of the pennies. I am not such a fool, nor yet so base, as to think seriously of asking her to share such a lot as mine"—he pointed contemptuously to the pipes and cards and dog-eared books—"I worship her from afar, and am content.

'The desire of the moth for the star, of the night for the morrow,' which I used to think vague and high falutin', is really the expression that suits me; I do not flatter myself with the hope of getting nearer to her. Only it is just this, Felspar, that if I thought I was about to die of this flea-bite"—and he touched his wounded hand—"I swear to you it would give me pleasure, since it would seem to me that I had perished in preserving her."

"And you have seen this young lady but twice, I believe, in your life, and only in the last twenty-four hours?" observed Felspar, quietly.

"Just so. I have seen the sunrise about as often, and may never see it again; but, for all that, I shall often think of it, and never forget it. I now know what the man meant who said that to have enjoyed the acquaintance of a certain lady was to have received a liberal education. You are thinking me a fool, of course; but you will observe that I am not such a fool as to suppose that this dream of mine can have any fulfilment. I am not telling it to you, as Pharaoh's butler told his to Joseph, with a view to interpretation, for it needs none. I am only keeping my word with you. And mind, old fellow, when your time comes, you keep your word with me."

"Very good. If it ever should come, I will," answered Felspar, slowly.

"You talk like an old bachelor, and you are but twenty-eight," exclaimed Vernon, laughing. "You look like one of those who preach the damnable doctrine that men are better without wives—a celibate, a misogynist. What the deuce has come to you? You could not wear a graver face if I had suggested pro-

posing myself to the Hon. George Emilius Josceline as a son-in-law in form: 'I have but a hundred a year, sir, it is true, but I have Genius with an enormous G.' Come, advise me, my philosopher and friend, as to this passion of my soul; though, indeed, I can read your thought in your face. You would bid me 'pluck it from my bosom though my heart be at the root,' and you would be quite right."

"I would bid you do nothing of the kind, Vernon. It is a matter, indeed, in which one man can scarcely advise another."

"And yet you told me once that your real reason for entering into our little compact was that you might have the opportunity, when I fell in love, of pulling me out of it, and saving me from the consequences of what was sure to be a great folly."

"Did I? That must have been in joke. I take it for granted," added Felspar, with a certain abrupt severity, "that you are not in joke now?"

"Certainly not, my dear fellow. One does not joke, as Mr. Serjeant Buzfuz observed, with the heart seared. Seriously, I am so far gone that when Mr. Josceline said he should come to ask after me to-morrow, accompanied by his daughter, my heart seemed to stop beating, and then, as if to make up for lost time, went on at the rate of—well, I should say, twenty miles an hour."

"I never heard of a heart going so far as that," replied Felspar, drily. "But that reminds me that I have not had my daily stretcher, and after a picnic one wants it more than usual. I suppose I can leave you without anxiety?"

"As regards the snake-bite, most certainly; and as

to the other wound"—and Vernon touched his heart, and laughed—"that is past remedy."

Felspar took his hat—a wide-awake, purchased of the Wallington general purveyor, and which needed much the title of "sombbrero" which Vernon had bestowed upon it to invest it with picturesqueness—and left the cottage. He took the path to the coast-guard station, which led over the cliffs for miles. The afternoon was hot, but he did not feel the heat; the views of sea and land were more glorious even than usual, but for once they had no attraction for him. He was thinking of his friend and of the strange confession he had just made to him. That it had been made in a half jocular form did not make it less serious; that was Vernon's way of alluding to any matter, however deeply he might feel it. Nor did Vernon's assertion that his sudden passion for Miss Josceline was, he was well aware, an impracticable dream afford Felspar much consolation on his friend's account. If Vernon had really felt it to be so, there would have been no need to mention it, for one doesn't tell one's dreams. Moreover, it had so happened that Felspar had given very particular attention, not only to Vernon's behaviour towards the young lady in question, but also to the manner in which his attentions had been received; and that they had been welcome to her he felt certain. Again, as to the little incident of the snake-bite, it was natural that Miss Josceline should have expressed concern about Vernon, who had been injured in preserving her from injury; but there are many ways of expressing concern, and it struck Felspar that in Miss Josceline's way there had been tenderness as well as gratitude. And as he

said to himself, not once nor twice, but often during that solitary walk, "And wherefore not?" Vernon was handsome, with manners exceedingly prepossessing, witty, or with the high spirits that easily pass for wit, and, indeed, are more attractive. This could not be gainsaid, and by Felspar least of all men; for the young fellow had won his way into the painter's own heart through his possession of those very gifts, and of much better ones, which it only needed knowledge of the man to discover. A franker or a more generous spirit did not exist; nor, notwithstanding that little touchiness about his poem, a more modest one withal. "I shall never do much for myself, and far less for the world, in my own calling," he had once said to Felspar. "I pursue it because I love it; because it is the pleasantest method that suggests itself for making my bread; and that my devotion is not reciprocated is not my fault. I have often read that a man should not take to letters as a calling unless he experiences a certain divine inspiration, or at least a confidence that he will reach the top of the tree; but why should it be so? A man is not dissuaded from the law because he has doubts of becoming Lord Chancellor; or from the Church because he feels it improbable he shall one day lodge in Lambeth Palace. Perhaps I might make more money—though I doubt it—in one of the more recognised professions; but I am deficient in the *auri sacra fames*—the passion for dying a millionaire that possesses so many excellent people. I had rather have a little and do what I like, than acquire a great deal by working against the grain."

This might not be very sensible, looked at from the man-of-the-world standpoint; but Felspar was not

a man of the world, and this candid statement of his young friend's opinion had recommended itself to him. It would not do so, of course, to most people; to some indeed, such as Mr. Josceline, for example, as he imagined, the very adoption of such a pursuit as literature would count against his young friend; its frequent failures, its small successes, and the very moderate social position it confers upon its disciples, would make it contemptible; but in the eyes of a few, themselves given to intellectual pursuits—young, too, and hopeful, and setting small store on material things—Vernon's calling would be an interesting one, and none the less so because it was precarious. In Miss Josceline's eyes, for example, unless he was much mistaken, it would be interesting.

One would have thought that to Mr. Felspar, while these reflections ran through his mind, it might have occurred that his own position in life was something akin to that of his young friend, while it had the undoubted advantage of being much more assured. He was an older man than Vernon, it is true; but he was still young, and could boast both of promise and performance. He was already making a small but sufficient income of his own, and, should he choose to restrict his attention to the portrait-taking branch of his profession (for which he had a considerable reputation), might do very well for himself. But if any comparison between himself and his friend did enter his mind, it came and went as swiftly as the sea-gull that occasionally crossed the patch of blue sky above him "with one waft of her wing."

It had happened to Felspar once in a far distant land to walk with a friend for miles in a lonely, sterile

track. In a certain gully where there was water and they had stopped to bathe, he had picked up a small rough lump of something which looked to him to be gold, of which there had of late been great discoveries in that neighbourhood; but being reticent by nature, doubting his own scanty stock of science, and also, perhaps (for he was younger then), sensitive to ridicule, he said nothing of it at the time, intending to confide in his friend later if he found his hopes confirmed. But that very evening, as they sat in their log hut together—for they were dwelling in the wilds—his friend had laid his hand upon his knee and earnestly exclaimed, “I have a secret to confide to you, old fellow, which will make both our fortunes. In Danton Creek to-day (the name of the gully) I found gold. The place is mine to work in by miners’ law, and as soon as I can get my claim you shall halve it.” Felspar had his own nugget in his pocket while the other spoke, but forbore to produce it. He would not rob his friend of the pleasure of an act of generosity, nor would he accept the half share of the claim, though he took some of it. His companion, who had recognised the gold at a glance, and had been the first to speak of it, had to Felspar’s mind the prior right to the discovery. And something of the same kind had happened that day to Vernon and himself; but, alas! the claim could not be shared.

CHAPTER XV.

THE CALL.

ON the morrow, Vernon’s hand was pronounced by the Doctor, who called upon him professionally, to

be doing fairly well; and after a late breakfast he pulled his arm-chair to the window with the intention, as usual, of smoking his pipe.

"I think you had better not do that," observed Felspar, who had been more silent that morning even than usual, and apparently much engaged with his pencil.

"Better not do what?" inquired the other in amazement; "not smoke?"

"Considering that a lady is coming to pay you a visit," continued Felspar, grimly, "I certainly think you had better not. Clover Cottage is not a very aristocratic abode, but why make it like a public-house?"

"Miss Josceline told me she did not object to smoke," replied Vernon.

"Still, her father probably does—at least, to pipe-smoking; he is the sort of man, I fancy, who thinks it vulgar to have anything in one's mouth but a cigarette."

"Very likely," said Vernon, proceeding deliberately to light his pipe; "I should think he was a man less charitable to vulgarity, or what he conceives to be such, than to worse things."

Felspar put down his pencil, and stared earnestly at his companion, who, unconscious of his gaze, continued to admire the landscape from the window seat, or to seem to do so.

"Pray, remember, my dear Felspar, that I do not deceive myself in this matter in any respect. If there were not half a dozen other obstacles to the realisation of this dream of mine, I believe the character of my proposed papa-in-law would be an insuperable one; we have nothing in common, he and I."

"You seem to have observed him very closely, considering your opportunities."

"I have. It is my trade to take stock of my fellow-creatures. We speak of some people as having all their faults upon the surface; with Mr. Josceline it is quite the reverse; all his virtues—such as they are—are made the most of; and they are only imitations of virtues. Instead of having true delicacy of feeling, he is merely fastidious; in place of independence of character, he shows a careless indifference which, however, changes to an affectation of polite interest when it is worth his while. Do you not notice what court he pays to your friend, Mrs. Jennynge, and how civil he is to Mr. Aird? It is because he believes them to be wealthy."

"I wonder," said Felspar, gently, and as if to himself, "whether this individual, thus graphically described, has ever adopted a contrary course towards any young gentleman he supposed to be poor. Instead of affecting a polite interest, I mean, is it possible that he has ever snubbed him?"

"No; to do him justice, I can't say that he has," replied Vernon, frankly; "he is so good as to endure me—at a distance."

"His tolerance does not appear to be reciprocated," observed Felspar, drily. "I do not deny your powers of intuition, my dear fellow: but although the study of character may be a man's calling, it does not follow that his judgments are always right. Your experience of life is as yet necessarily limited, which renders you liable to mistakes, and, in this case, are you sure you are not swayed by personal prejudice? You talk about the difference of views entertained by yourself and

Mr. Josceline as being an obstacle in relation to a certain matter, but is not that gentleman himself an obstacle? I am not a student of human nature by profession; I am only a painter. But I have lived in the world longer than you have."

"You are a better judge of men than I am," broke in the other; "I grant that; and I dare say of women, too. To you my passion for this Dulcinea may seem utterly incomprehensible: but it has caused me to observe her closely, to remember every word she has uttered, to treasure it up——"

"We need not discuss the young lady," interrupted Felspar, coldly; "we were talking of her father."

"Very good; let us finish with him first. Now, upon your honour, Felspar"—and the young man turned his chair round and confronted his friend—"do you really like Mr. Josceline?"

"I think he is the most agreeable man I ever met."

"That's no answer to my question. I allow that his powers of pleasing—or rather of making himself pleasant—are extraordinary. In the billiard-room the other night, under great disadvantages, he acquitted himself in that way to admiration; but there is no naturalness about him: he gives one the idea of an actor; whereas his daughter——"

"Let me again remind you, we are talking of the father, my dear fellow."

"True; well, he strikes me as the most polished of actors."

"Which is surely high praise," returned Felspar. "He exerted himself, too, for our sakes; there was nothing charged for admission. You are like the people who go to the play with orders; they are always the

most critical. Why should this gentleman have troubled himself, unless from good nature, to make himself agreeable at all? It is not the way with those who find everybody (as he has done) at the *Ultramarine* ready to worship him. And as to his acting, his *rôle* of father at least strikes me as nature itself."

"Yes; I admit it, he is fond of his daughter," observed Vernon, slowly.

"Are you sure, then, that you are not prejudiced against him on that account? That is to say, would you not like him better if he struck you as less resolute to assert (which he does, somehow, without assertion) her position and his own?"

"I think not; I hope not," said Vernon, doubtfully: "if I were so influenced, it would prove me to be a fool—a madman."

"At all events, I think it would be very bad manners to show any dislike to him. And if—if you have the regard for Miss Josceline of which you speak, it strikes me that for her sake you should pay her father due deference and respect."

"Would you have me truckle to him for his daughter's sake?" exclaimed Vernon, pacing the room excitedly. "Would you have me put it in his power to tell me some day, in his smooth, gracious way, that I was giving myself very unnecessary trouble in making myself agreeable to him?"

"Good heavens! Do you suppose, then, that he entertains any suspicion of your passion?"

"Of course not; and he never shall. No one but yourself shall ever do that. I am sorry that I told even you."

"So am I," returned Felspar, gravely; "that is," he

added, quickly, "if it distresses you to have done so. But, having confided in me, it is surely allowable to offer you a friend's advice."

"Of course it is, my dear Felspar. And, as it happens, I am wise enough to take it. You will have no cause to complain of my behaviour to Mr. Josceline. Only I will not go one hair's breadth out of my way to make what is called a good impression on him."

"Very good; there is, however, no occasion to make a bad impression. I am sorry you insist on smoking; but, at all events, let me entreat you to put somewhere out of sight of your expected visitors that choice but not very attractive collection of pipes; those dog-eared railway volumes, and especially that yellow French novel; and those packs of playing cards, which suggest the idea of our being a couple of gamblers who practise our art assiduously at home before sallying out to cheat the public."

"I will put away the French novel, Felspar, but not the rest," said Vernon, decisively. "I am not going to sail under false colours. There is my table, the table of Thomas Idle; and there is yours, by comparison a very neat and tidy one, and obviously the table of Francis Goodchild——By Jove! here they are at the door."

And, in spite of his resolve to appear at his worst, Mr. Vernon hurriedly knocked the ashes from his pipe, and if his arm had not been in a sling would have run his fingers through his hair.

The next moment Mr. Josceline and his daughter were announced.

"We are come to inquire after the invalid," said

that gentleman, gaily. "I need hardly ask, however, having seen him, 'Is he better?'"

Indeed, Vernon's face was of a colour which, if it was not an evidence of high fever, was calculated to set the anxieties of his friends at rest on the score of health.

"I am quite ashamed to have brought you here, and especially Miss Josceline," replied the sick man, "upon what must seem to be such false pretences. I feel like a rank impostor. Except that my right hand is a little swollen, there is nothing whatever the matter with me."

"But there might have been, Mr. Vernon," said Ella, gravely. "I have come to thank you——"

"Oh, please don't!" interrupted Vernon. "I have done nothing to earn thanks, and if you only knew the pleasure——" He hesitated, and then stopped short, covered with confusion and humiliation. The earnest, eager words had escaped him unconsciously; but directly they had passed his lips, he recognised what he had said, and the tone of it; and bitterly regretted both.

"Now, that's very prettily said," remarked Mr. Josceline, with an air of extreme good nature. "Mr. Vernon would have you believe, Ella, that the aspic's bite is quite a luxury—like aspic jelly."

"At all events, I beg to state that *I* have suffered," observed Felspar. "For, as Vernon's hand was lamed, I have had to act as his amanuensis, and in that capacity have had not only to listen to one of his own poems, but to write it down."

"You ought to have considered it a great privilege," said Mr. Josceline, with pretended indignation. "What a snug bachelor's room you two gentlemen have got

here!" And he glanced admiringly at the cheap railway volumes as though he were in the Bodleian—and in the presence of the librarian.

"We play a little piquet together occasionally in the evenings," explained Mr. Felspar, putting in a word of apology for the cards.

"But generally cribbage," put in Vernon; "and not only in the evenings, but also on wet days."

"And quite right too," remarked Mr. Josceline, approvingly. "I have always thought that cribbage is not sufficiently appreciated. It teaches one arithmetic, for one thing."

"I wish it would teach *me*," said Vernon. "Arithmetic is one of the things (like Lord Dundreary) I never *can* understand."

"Ah, that is because you have so much imagination!" returned Mr. Josceline. "The wretched details of pounds, shillings, and pence are always offensive to a man of letters."

"Fortunately, however, his calling does not demand much acquaintance with pounds," observed Vernon.

"Then, in that case," remarked Felspar, drily, "the general opinion as to the sums made by literary men in these days must be very erroneous. I know many living writers—by name at least—who have the reputation of making large incomes by their pens."

"Oh, the reputation!" replied Vernon, scornfully. "I could have had the reputation of making 50% by a poem of five hundred lines, if I had chosen to have it."

"Dear me! Now that's very interesting," said Mr. Josceline; "you could have got two shillings a line, if

you pleased, for writing a poem that took you how long?"

"Well, perhaps two months, off and on."

"Now that's marvellous! No less than three hundred a year, if you could always have gone on writing!"

"Yes; but I did not say I could have got the 50%, but only the reputation of having got it," said Vernon coldly. "As a matter of fact, I should only have netted 5%."

"I don't understand," said Mr. Josceline.

"Well; few people would," continued Vernon smiling. "The circumstances were these. A certain weekly newspaper—price twopence——"

"That presupposes nothing," observed Felspar, in allusion to the other's contemptuous air. "It may have been twopence to buy, but ten thousand a year in the pockets of the proprietors."

"It may have been; but it wasn't," continued Vernon, coolly. "The 'Bloodred Banner,' as it was called, was, I have reason to suspect, in no very prosperous circumstances when it offered a prize of 50% for the best poem of five hundred lines upon the subject of 'Liberty.' I was a candidate for it, and, I may say, the successful one, since I received a private communication from the editor to say if I would accept 5% instead of the 50%. I should have all the honours of victory, and have my name and address printed as the winner. I did not accept the generous proposal; but, as I have said, I might have done it, and so far secured a reputation."

"But what a dreadful man the editor must have been!" exclaimed Ella.

"Well; he was not a very nice man," answered Vernon, laughing; "but I conclude his proprietors were the people to blame in that matter."

"A most interesting revelation, I am sure," observed Mr. Josceline. "It is quite delightful to get, as it were, behind the scenes of literature in this way."

"The 'Bloodred Banner' could scarcely be called literature," remarked Felspar; "and no one is more aware of the fact than Vernon."

"Well; I think that's very hard," said Mr. Josceline, laughing, "considering that our young friend here wrote for it."

"But then, papa, he did not know at that time what sort of people they were," remarked Ella; "and I am sure he had nothing more to do with them when he found it out."

"Well; I confess I did not enter into any more competitions for their prize poems," admitted Vernon, smiling.

"He might also confess, Miss Josceline, if he chose," said Felspar, "that he never again wrote for the 'Banner.' To do him justice, he is not a person to sail under false pretences, or to associate with those who do."

"Nay; you must really not say that, Felspar," said Vernon, with a laugh that had a curious sort of bitterness in it, "since you know all about the 'Village Lytch-Gate.'"

"Now what was that?" inquired Mr. Josceline. "I dare say it is very entertaining, though the name sounds a little melancholy."

"It sounds very melancholy," assented Vernon, "and was intended to be so. The 'Village Lytch-

Gate' was a magazine started to attract the melancholy public, which is a very large one. I was one of its staff. I wrote an article monthly called 'The Vicar's Musings;' they were signed 'The Old Vicar.' I was then about eighteen. They used to begin in this way; 'From the window where I now sit my eye rests upon my wife's grave; fresh flowers are strewn upon it. She is not lost, but gone before,' and so on. They were thought a good deal of by the melancholy newspapers, the favourable notices of which I used to read with avidity: 'The Old Vicar *is as thoughtful and serene as ever this week;*' 'The Old Vicar *will be widely read, and do good,*' &c. He could not, however, have been very widely read," added Vernon, "because the magazine expired in its fourth month."

It was curious to watch the different effect of the recital of this literary experience, which was given in the most humorous manner, in the faces of those who listened to it. That of Mr. Felspar was very grave; he felt that Vernon was sinking lower and lower in the opinion of their visitors with every word he spoke, and, though he knew that the young fellow was designedly making the worst of himself, he was powerless to remove the bad impression thus created. What he told was true in the main, and could not be contradicted. He was telling it, as Felspar well understood, in a sort of desperation; he wished his two visitors to understand that he was but a free-lance of literature, with as little principle as prosperity—a "detrimental" of the very saddest class. That he had quite succeeded in attaining this object, so far as Mr. Josceline was concerned, was evident, and also that it was the very impression which that gentleman would

have had him convey. His face expressed an amused contempt, which annoyed Felspar exceedingly. Ella's countenance, on the other hand, though it had a tinge of sadness in it, as though she regretted that Vernon had assumed, even in the pages of a magazine, a fictitious character, and especially such a one as he had impersonated, was full of the liveliest interest; and this, perhaps, pained Felspar—though he would not have owned it even to himself—more than her father's scorn. She had not been able to avoid laughing, even at the most serious parts of the young man's recital, and when he finished she certainly looked much more amused than shocked.

"A most entertaining experience," observed Mr. Josceline, "and, what is more, so thoroughly characteristic. This Bohemian sort of existence of yours, my dear Mr. Vernon, must surely have great charms."

"Yes," returned the young man gravely; "in some respects it has an advantage over even the possession of large estates; for property, one always hears it said, has its duties as well as its privileges: whereas those who pursue the calling of literature are looked upon by the world at large as irresponsible for their actions, and nothing in the way of respectability is expected of them."

"And a very agreeable position, too, I should imagine," remarked Mr. Josceline, with the air of a man who, for his own part, was the pink of propriety, and had served the office of churchwarden in his parish for many years. "By-the-bye, Mr. Felspar," he added, "before we bring our most interesting visit to Clover Cottage to a close, my daughter has something to say to you, I believe, respecting her progress in Art."

"Oh, papa! how can you?" remonstrated Ella. "I merely told my father, Mr. Felspar, that I should trouble you for your opinion, and perhaps for a hint or two, since you were so good as to offer them, respecting a little drawing I did last night. When you happen to be at the hotel I shall get you to look at it."

"Oh, but I've brought it with me!" said Mr. Josceline, quietly. "I thought that is what you wanted, my dear; at all events, it will give Mr. Felspar less trouble to ask him about it here. One may accept advice from a physician as a friend, if one meets him in the street; but if you summon him for a consultation, that is a professional matter, and should be recompensed accordingly." At this juncture the post arrived with a letter for Vernon. "There, my dear Ella, while Mr. Vernon is reading his correspondence—which I hope he will do, or he will make us quite uncomfortable—you can lay your little difficulties before Mr. Felspar. That is my daughter's drawing; it seems to represent an Italian organ-grinder."

Vernon had broken the envelope of his letter; but at these words he desisted from further attempts in that direction, and listened with all his ears. His heart beat so fast and loud that he thought the others must hear it.

"The young foreigner," continued Mr. Josceline, with the drawing held critically before him, "has placed his objectionable instrument upon the ground, and, though evidently in a picturesque part of the country, is regarding the works of nature with anything but an appreciative eye. He is apparently saying to himself, 'This locality is very inferior to what I am accustomed to at home.'"

"If I am not mistaken," said Mr. Felspar, quietly, "that is the very impression Miss Josceline wished to convey. We were talking on the subject on our way to the picnic yesterday; for my friend Vernon——"

"Indeed, Mr. Felspar," interrupted Ella, appealingly, though in a tone she did her best to render indifferent, "I would much rather that the consideration of my poor drawing was left to some other time. It is a positive waste of opportunities, since you have your own portfolio here; and both papa and I are so desirous to see those sketches of Wallington Bay and its neighbourhood, which we have heard are so beautiful."

"Yes, indeed," said Mr. Josceline; "next to making due inquiry after our young friend, our object in coming here was the hope of our being so favoured, I do assure you."

With a bow and a quiet smile Mr. Felspar undid the strings of the portfolio, when the very first drawing that presented itself, to his own horror and to the astonishment of his visitors, was a portrait of Miss Ella Josceline. It was but an outline, rapidly sketched in while his friend had been talking to him on the subject of the original on the previous evening; but for whom it was intended there could be no doubt.

"Why, dear me, that's you, Ella," observed Mr. Josceline, drily.

Mr. Felspar was almost at his wits' end with confusion. He had quite forgotten that he had himself placed the sketch among his landscapes in order to conceal it from Vernon's eyes, and his own amazement at beholding it there was hardly less than that of the other two. "I am afraid I must plead guilty," he

said, "to having portrayed Miss Josceline from memory. It is a habit I have when any face strikes me—when, in fact, I see any new face. I have got Miss Jennynge somewhere, and Davey Aird. They are little better than caricatures."

"Nay; this is very good," said Mr. Josceline, frankly, "and very like."

"The association may give it a fictitious value in your eyes, Mr. Josceline," said Felspar, modestly; "in which case I hope you will do me the favour to accept it."

Mr. Josceline expressed himself in proper terms of gratitude and appreciation. They were in some degree genuine, for the sketch of his daughter pleased him much; but, as his habit was, he greatly exaggerated his sense of the value of the gift—and yet, if he had used much stronger and more fervent expressions, they would have been inadequate to suggest what it cost the giver.

CHAPTER XVI.

ELLA IS GIVEN HER "CHANCE."

It was most creditable to Felspar's powers of self-control that, after the first moment of astonishment at the sight of Ella's portrait in his portfolio, he had contrived to put on the whole affair the most matter-of-fact and commonplace construction. It is probable that the keen intelligence of Mr. Josceline would have had its suspicions had they not already been excited in another quarter; but, as matters were, the painter's explanation of the matter seemed quite sufficient to

him. He understood, indeed, that Felspar admired his daughter; that he had been so struck with her appearance, in fact, that he had made for himself a lasting record of it; but this was only, as he imagined, in a professional way. Upon the whole he was rather flattered and pleased by the circumstance than otherwise.

Ella understood, of course—what woman would not?—that a very pretty compliment had been paid to her, and that was all. It was not the same sort of compliment which she had paid to Vernon in portraying the “Organ Boy,” though thereby she had only intended to express an interest in the subject which might be supposed to be occupying his attention, and which had by chance attracted her own. She felt grateful to Mr. Felspar for having taken so much trouble about her, though, as he protested, it had been but a few minutes’ work, and especially for having pleased her father by making him a present of the sketch; but, as her feelings went no further, she in no way shared his embarrassment.

As for Vernon, he was not even aware of what was taking place; and even if he had been, it is probable that the discovery of Ella’s portrait in his friend’s portfolio would not just then have had any especial significance for him. The fact was he was thinking of her solely in reference to himself. To him it seemed that her selection of his “Organ Boy” as a subject for her pencil was not only the most gracious compliment that had ever been conferred upon him, but—for one treacherous moment—something more. Was it not possible that the interest excited by the subject of his poem might have extended to the author himself? If

so—well, if so, it would be a great misfortune for herself, and he had involuntarily become the cause of her unhappiness. For although it might have struck anyone who had heard him speak, as he had spoken to Felspar, of his conviction of the hopelessness of his passion for Miss Josceline, that he did "protest too much," his protestations had been perfectly genuine. For a young man, Vernon was exceptionally gifted with common sense; he did not agree with the general opinions of mankind, but he understood them, and appreciated their force. He kept his imagination for his stories and his poems, and to matters of real life applied a very practical judgment. His sense of humour—a very great safety valve for our enthusiasms—enabled him to see what was ridiculous, even in his own aspirations. But for one moment, as I have said, when Mr. Josceline had mentioned what Ella's pencil had been engaged upon, Vernon had allowed himself to be carried away by a feeling of rapturous exaltation.

He recovered himself almost immediately; and, even while Felspar was untying his portfolio, had begun to open the letter which had arrived for him, though with his mind scarcely fitted for business affairs. The note was from the editor of the "Keepsake," and ran as follows:—

"Dear V.,—I hope you have not drawn largely upon the founts of inspiration as regards the 'Organ Grinder.' The wife of the artist who had the picture in hand writes to say that 'the pressure of mental work' has been for the present too much for her husband—a euphemism, very likely, for the premonitory symptoms of *delirium tremens*, for I know he is fond

of the sparkling bowl; but at all events there is no chance of the drawing being ready for our next number unless your friend Felspar could be induced to help us."

Now Felspar, for certain technical reasons which are neither here nor there—or at all events have no business here—had set his face, as Vernon was well aware, against illustrating for the magazines; but since Miss Josceline, it seemed, had drawn the required illustration, why should not *that* fill up the vacancy on the poetic page of the "Keepsake"? I am sorry to say that for once, though Vernon was always loyal to his employers, the reflection that the picture might not be good enough for the place did not enter into his mind. There was only room there for the ecstatic idea of his own lines to the young Italian exile being illustrated by his divinity. There seemed an appropriateness in this connection such as not the most enthusiastic eulogiser of the fitness of things had ever conceived. If he had a doubt about the merits of the two productions it was of the poem; not indeed, as to whether it was up to the standard of the "Keepsake" (which, to say the truth, was not greatly above the average of human genius), but whether it was worthy of association with Ella's handiwork. Every poet thinks that his last lines are the best he has written; but Vernon would, if he could, have had all the genius that belonged to him, or which ever should belong to him, compressed into those three verses, for Ella's sake.

He did not indulge in the frantic despair expressed by the lover in "Locksley Hall" that they should perish "rolled in one another's arms, and silent

in a last embrace;" he only wished to be bound in the same volume with her—her picture face to face with his poem—and then if the magazine were to stop and never to come out again, he felt as if he could have borne it.

He heard Felspar explaining where this and that sketch in his portfolio had been taken from, how far the place might be from Wallington by land or sea, and the beauties of it when you got there. He heard the visitors praise the pictures, Mr. Josceline lamenting in his most dulcet tones that such treasures of art should be buried in a portfolio and not exhibited in public for the delectation of the human race; and Ella expressing her despair of ever doing anything to equal them if she should live to be a hundred; but not a word was spoken about Ella's own little drawing, which for him had a greater interest than all the landscapes in the world, whether in nature, oils, or water-colours.

"I see all these are landscapes," observed Mr. Josceline, who had that modified form of appreciation of art called taste, and had taken a genuine interest in the sketches (which were in fact water-colour drawings). "Do you do nothing in the way of figures?"

"A little," said Felspar, smiling.

"Oh, papa, you have surely heard of Mr. Felspar's portraits!" murmured Ella.

"I have lived abroad for many years," explained Mr. Josceline, without turning a hair in the way of embarrassment. "One of the misfortunes of that mode of life is that it leaves one in ignorance of all that goes on in the world of literature and art. That Mr. Felspar can take a likeness when he pleases we have had a

most gratifying proof, and if he portrays persons generally as well as he does places (as I do not doubt), there must be another treat in store for us."

"Oh, pray do not let us see any of your figure drawings to-day, Mr. Felspar!" pleaded Ella. "As papa has brought my own poor little sketch here, I cannot risk any comparisons; and I know you will tell me what is wrong with it—or rather, whether it is all wrong."

"Your sketch has been infamously neglected, Miss Josceline," said Felspar, smiling, "but it was really not my fault; you will bear me witness, Vernon, that commands were laid upon me which compelled this egotistic exhibition."

"I did not hear them," said Vernon drily, "and can therefore give no evidence except to character. I can only say that I have always noticed in professionals a very marked jealousy of amateurs."

"And in cases where work is so good as this it is not only natural but excusable," said Felspar, gallantly.

He had taken the drawing in his hand, and was holding it out at arm's length, so that all the others could see it.

"There is a great deal of expression in this, Miss Josceline, and still more of suggestion. The figure, however, is here a little out of drawing."

"Well, upon my word!" exclaimed Vernon indignantly.

"Mr. Felspar is quite right," said Ella; "I can see it myself. The poor boy's arm is broken."

"Do not let us say broken," said Felspar, soothingly. "It is not what Dr. Cooper calls a 'compound comminuted fracture,' at all events; there, you see, a

stroke of the pencil has cured him. One of his legs, too, is a little queer."

"I should say both his legs," said Mr. Josceline, uncompromisingly; "one is certainly shorter than the other."

"Nay, it looks to me only foreshortened," said Vernon; "just, in fact, as it ought to be."

"Then the hills," continued Felspar, critically, "are lumpy."

"You wouldn't have them flat, would you?" inquired Vernon.

"I quite see what Mr. Felspar means," said Ella, humbly. "If it was not for his good-nature, he would tell me the whole truth."

"I will, if you really wish it," said Felspar, gravely.

"Quite right," assented Mr. Josceline; "it is much better, my dear Ella, that you should not flatter yourself with illusions about your own proficiency. It is a sort of thing in which it takes a lifetime to attain any sort of excellence. *Ars longa, vita brevis.*"

"Which, being translated," muttered Vernon, "means that, so far as Art is concerned, Life is too short for the rubbish that is talked about it."

"Well, the fact is, so far as my judgment is worth anything," pronounced Felspar, seriously, "this little drawing of yours, Miss Josceline, is full of merit; nay, if you have really never had a master, I will add, of genius."

"And Felspar is a man who knows," put in Vernon, quickly.

"Yes, yes; but we must not misunderstand him," observed Mr. Josceline, who though secretly pleased with this praise of his daughter's talents, was nerv-

ously apprehensive that it might strengthen her in those ideas of supporting herself by her own exertions which he had his own reasons for discouraging. "We must remember that Mr. Felspar is giving judgment—and a very good-natured one—upon the picture as an amateur production, and that he does not for a moment bring it into comparison (indeed, as you have heard, my daughter has the sense to perceive that for herself) with the work of a professional."

"It is quite true I made no comparison of that sort, Mr. Josceline," said Felspar, gravely; "but, carefully guarding myself from the language of exaggeration, I have seen many worse drawings than your daughter's in public exhibitions; nor do I doubt for an instant that this would find its place and fetch its price with those, for example, of our magazines which publish woodcuts."

"With all deference, I should very much doubt that," observed Mr. Josceline, hurriedly; "though, as there is no chance of the matter in question being brought to proof, we may each retain our respective opinions."

"As it happens," observed Vernon, with quiet distinctness, "there is a chance, and indeed a most excellent opportunity, of bringing the thing to a test at once;" and he placed his letter from the editor of the "Mayfair Keepsake" into Mr. Josceline's hand.

"Dear me!" said that gentleman, perusing it aloud, and frowning a good deal more than was necessary to maintain the equilibrium of his double glasses upon his nose, "the coincidence is certainly remarkable—very remarkable;" indeed, for one instant it was plain that a suspicion of the whole affair being what the

police call a "plant" was passing through his mind. "Still, although I perceive the chance it offers of my daughter's drawing taking the place of that of the gentleman who has succumbed to *delirium tremens*—which would, of course, be a great compliment to her—it does not appear a certainty; and, granting that she would fully appreciate the honour of contributing to the columns of the 'Keepsake,' I think it would distress her in a proportionate degree to be rejected. I should be very unwilling, very, to expose her to the risk of such a humiliation."

"Oh, papa, do let me try, just once!" exclaimed Ella, appealingly. "It will be no humiliation to me to fail, but only a very proper reproof to my presumption. And if I were to succeed, oh, dear papa, you don't know what an extreme pleasure it would be to me!"

"What an extraordinary thing!" remonstrated Mr. Josceline. "An extreme pleasure to see your drawing in the columns of this twopenny-halfpenny magazine!"

"It's a sixpenny one," observed Vernon, with some dignity; for he did not like to hear one of the few periodicals in which he found acceptance so materially depreciated.

"What *does* it signify," exclaimed Mr. Josceline, allowing himself for an instant to show his irritation, "if it were half-a-crown? I say, what pleasure, my dear Ella, can you possibly find in seeing your pretty little drawing spoilt by a clumsy woodcutter"—in his hurry he said woodpecker, which made him still more angry—"for that, I believe, is what usually happens."

Ella said nothing; the transparent pretence of his being interested in the well-being of her drawing did

not impose upon her for an instant, but she felt it was her duty to submit.

Vernon was too indignant to trust himself to speak: he felt as much disgusted with Mr. Josceline as though he had been one of those selfish possessors of gems of art who will not allow them to be engraved for the benefit of mankind; but it was not on public grounds that he was so; it seemed to him a most infamous cruelty that any one should oppose Ella's wishes.

"I don't think, Mr. Josceline," said Felspar, smiling, "if you will pardon me for saying it, that you quite understand your daughter's feelings in this little matter; the getting one's drawing published is to the young artist what getting into print is to the author. Have *you* never longed, as a young man, to get into print?"

"No, sir; I never was"—he was about to say—"such a fool;" but he stopped himself adroitly, as a skater on the brink of an icehole, who, instead of progressing into the abyss, indulges in a flourish; "that is, I mean, the enthusiasm of youth in my case never took that particular direction."

"Then you must permit me to say," said Felspar, earnestly, "that in this particular case you can be no judge. Miss Josceline will of course bow to her father's decision; but, if I know human nature, she will be unable to divest herself of the sense of a lost opportunity. She will probably exaggerate to herself the importance of it, and the very disappointment may even beget a false confidence in her own talents: 'But for papa,' she will say, 'I might have done wonders.' Whereas, if you allowed her—'just once,' as she puts

it—to try her wings, she would take a more moderate view of her merits. If the drawing was rejected, for example, as you fear will be the case, it would be a severe, but on the whole, perhaps, not an unwholesome lesson."

Ella little thought what a sharp sweet sense of pain was inflicted by the look of gratitude she here cast upon Michael Felspar. If he had earned it for himself it would have been an unalloyed delight; but his contention—though it seemed to be for her sake alone—was for another.

"Of course you ought to know best, Mr. Felspar," said Mr. Josceline, with gentle gravity. There was no longer opposition in his tone; an idea had occurred to him which had put an entirely different aspect on the case. "I will not pit my prejudices against your experience. Let my daughter's drawing take its chance with the Jupiter of the 'Mayfair Keepsake.'"

"Oh, that is kind of you, dear papa," cried Ella, rapturously; and, indeed, perhaps in all her life she had never been so grateful to the author of her being. If it had not been for the presence of the two young men, she would have embraced him; but, most fortunately for both of them, she abstained from that tantalising performance.

"Only if the venture does not succeed, Ella," continued Mr. Josceline, gravely, "I do hope there will be no more attempts at rivalry with the gentleman whom his wife describes as having overworked his brain. You have promised that it shall be only 'just this once,' remember."

Ella's countenance fell, or rather the bright light died out of it for an instant, and then rayed forth again.

"Indeed, papa, I shall be quite satisfied with the editor's verdict," she answered, earnestly; "and, if you wish it, will consider it as final."

"Why, bless my soul!" exclaimed Vernon, involuntarily, "I had six-and-twenty contributions rejected in my first year."

"My friend is very frank," observed Felspar, smiling. "It is not the way of young gentlemen of letters to speak of their little disappointments so naively."

"It does him great credit, I'm sure," remarked Mr. Josceline, in a tone, however, in which approbation was much tempered by sarcasm. "The interesting fact he has communicated, however it may detract from his literary merits, speaks volumes for his perseverance."

"Vernon has forgotten to add," rejoined Felspar, "that many of those articles have since been accepted."

"Not one half of them," observed Vernon, grimly; "you see before you a literary genius who has been even less appreciated than—in the dramatic line—was Miss Snevelicci's papa."

"It does not seem to have affected your spirits, Mr. Vernon," said Mr. Josceline, good-naturedly. "And now that we have also satisfied ourselves as to the state of your health, it is time we took our leave. My daughter was saying, Mr. Felspar, that you had been kind enough to promise to lend her some figure-drawings for her instruction. If you are dining at the hotel this afternoon, and would bring them up yourself and take a cup of coffee with us after dinner, it would give us great pleasure. I should have included Mr. Vernon in the invitation, but that I am sure he ought to stay at home and nurse."

It was with difficulty that Vernon restrained himself from asserting that nothing was wanted to complete his convalescence except a cup of coffee; but his determination not to make a fool of himself came opportunely to his aid. Felspar, on the other hand, felt the danger that would accrue to his self-sacrificing resolutions from the acceptance of such a proposal.

"I must, I fear, decline your kind invitation," he said; "for the fact is that we have promised Mrs. Gammer to dine at home, and to change her arrangements after they have once been made is more than her lodgers dare to venture upon; besides," he added, dropping his voice, and with a smile that was full of kindness for his friend and something more—a sort of tacit assertion of the other's worthiness—"I should hardly like to leave our invalid here all alone. On the other hand, if you are returning to the hotel, as I conclude, to luncheon, I will accompany you with great pleasure, and take the drawings with me."

"I hardly like to trouble you so far," said Mr. Josceline, in the most apologetic of tones; but in his secret heart he had a reason for liking it very much, and indeed for greatly preferring that arrangement to his original proposal.

CHAPTER XVII.

MR. JOSCELINE BECOMES CONFIDENTIAL.

It was curious, considering that the visit to Clover Cottage had been paid ostensibly to Vernon, how little had been said to him, and how small a part he had himself played during the interview; but, never-

theless, he had been the chief object of interest to all concerned, though to each in a different way. It was not his presence, however, which had forbidden them to manifest this feeling; for even when the three had left him and were on their way to the hotel they made no allusion to him, such as folks are wont to make when they have just left the society of one in whom they have a common interest. Mr. Josceline had merely observed indifferently, "I think we may feel quite comfortable as to our young friend's getting out of the wood," with reference to the snake-bite, and also by way of hint that there would be no necessity for making further "kind inquiries," and Mr. Felspar had answered, "I think so, indeed;" which closed the subject. The conversation turned upon the beauties of the neighbourhood, and Ella expressed her desire to make an expedition some day to the Griffin's Head—not a public-house, but a promontory—the picture of which, among Mr. Felspar's fine collection, had struck her fancy most. He accompanied them to the hotel, where he left the drawings for Ella, and then took leave of them both; but when not a hundred yards on his way back he heard his name called out, and turning round, beheld Mr. Josceline coming after him. He stopped at once, which was fortunate, for that gentleman had become slow of movement from other causes than that of age, and in the present case a certain agitation of mind made him still more scant of breath than usual. Felspar noticed with surprise that he wore a grave and serious air which contrasted strangely with his accustomed tone of courteous frivolity.

"If you can give me five minutes' private conver-

sation, Mr. Felspar," he said, "and will accommodate a gentleman who is not so young as he was, by sitting down on yonder bench, you will much oblige me." The hotel grounds were not only what its advertisements had described, when they were on sale, as "happily situated," but were dotted about by innumerable benches and garden seats, placed in the most advantageous positions; some in the more retired spots, with a possible eye to the interchange of the feelings of the heart, and others to satisfy (so far as an extensive view could do it) the exactions of the soul. The one to which Mr. Josceline referred combined in some degree both these qualities. It crowned the summit of an elevation which afforded a fine prospect, and yet stood by itself apart from the carriage drive on a little path that led nowhere else, under the shade of a noble tree.

In after years the scene often recurred to Felspar. The distant bay, the still more distant ships, the green hills sleeping in the sunshine, and the persuasive accents of an old world-wearied man speaking of one most dear to him, and whom he was about to leave for ever, in words that touched his heart like music, albeit with a false note that ran through all. "Mr. Felspar," he began, after a little pause, "it is possible that I may be making a great mistake in the confidence I am about to repose in you; but I have been accustomed to study mankind, and believe I am speaking to a gentleman and a man of honour."

"If I am not mistaken in myself, Mr. Josceline," answered Felspar, quietly, "I believe I would do nothing dishonourable."

"And be sure I would not ask you to do so," was

the other's prompt and unexpected rejoinder; and again there was a pause. "The subject on which I desire to speak," he resumed, "is a delicate one, and the difficulty is greater because I am addressing a comparative stranger. It will be better, therefore, in the first place, to speak of the facts we know, or at least which *you* know. May I ask, Mr. Felspar, from what cause, or at whose instigation, my daughter was induced to draw that picture of the 'Organ Boy?' The subject was not selected by chance," he added confidently, and with a quick glance of suspicion at his companion; "of that I am certain."

"It arose, Mr. Josceline, I have no doubt, in the conversation, yesterday, among the young people——"

"You mean Mr. Vernon, yourself, my daughter, and Miss Jennynge?" put in the other.

"Well; I do not class myself among the young people," said Felspar, smiling. "I am not old, of course, but I am much older than they; and there are circumstances—I have had, that is, more experience of life than most men of my years, and it has aged me."

"You are a man of mature thought and fixed principles," assented Mr. Josceline, gravely; "I have found out that for myself, or I should not now be addressing you. These young people, then, were talking about a subject for a picture?"

"They were talking about a picture which had been indicated to Vernon by his editor as the subject of a poem. I read the verses in question yesterday."

"Written to order?" observed Mr. Josceline, with an elevation of his delicate eyebrows.

"Yes; and, considering the circumstances, they do him great credit."

"Possibly. Their appearance in print will no doubt also do him great credit. But we are not similarly situated, Mr. Felspar. What would be a credit to some people would be a discredit—or let me rather say, a serious disadvantage—to others."

"I cannot pretend to be ignorant of the case to which you allude," said Felspar, gently, "and I must be allowed to say that I do not agree with you. What can there be disadvantageous—or, as I suppose you would put it, derogatory—in a young lady of whatever rank occupying herself with her pencil and obtaining praise for it—even public praise?"

"And payment?" inquired Mr. Josceline.

"Yes, in my opinion, and even payment. The artist, like any other labourer, is worthy of his hire."

"Well; we will not discuss that question, Mr. Felspar. You are wide of the mark in supposing that I think the exercise of her artistic skill (if she possesses any) to be derogatory to my daughter's position; I will not even say it is unsuitable to it; but it is disadvantageous. Of that—at some pain to myself—I am about to convince you. It is probable that you have no very high opinion of birth and blood."

Felspar moved his hand, and smiled.

"Just so; you would say, 'You never said so;' in my presence you have too much delicacy of mind to express such views; but I am a pretty close observer of mankind, and I know I am right in my supposition: I have not the least desire to argue the matter; frankly indeed, though I may seem committed to the other

view of the matter, we are, as it happens, agreed upon the point. We must, however, take the world as we find it. One of the many weaknesses of the aristocratic class is to despise work; to look down upon those who, either from necessity or independence of spirit, make their own living in the world, or even attempt to do so. I have no hesitation in saying that amongst the young men of that class it would be considered what they call 'bad form' in my daughter Ella if she were known to be a contributor—for pay to the columns of a magazine."

"I can only say," replied Felspar, grimly, "that although you have guessed rightly as to my social views—which, indeed, are somewhat democratic—I should have hesitated to express such an opinion of our gilt youth; if you are right, they have much less sense than even I have given them credit for."

"Whether your deduction is correct or not, Mr. Felspar, of the fact I am quite certain. Now, to be plain with you, my daughter will not be an heiress, or anything like it. I am a poor man."

Felspar murmured a sympathising "Indeed!" but, though he would have been ashamed to own it, the intelligence, while it surprised, did not displease him.

"On the other hand, my daughter is designed," continued Mr. Josceline, "not only by me, but by nature, to marry in her own rank of life. Her education has fitted her for it, her tastes are in accordance with it; and it is to a good marriage—I am very frank with you, you may say, but the more frank I am with you, remember, the higher compliment I pay you—I say it is to a good marriage that my daughter must trust for her future maintenance and happiness."

"Happiness?" repeated Felspar, gently. "A father of course should be the best judge of his daughter's character; but is a good marriage, as you term it, necessarily a happy marriage?"

"Not necessarily; no; but it at least presents more chance of happiness than a bad one. If my daughter married beneath her—I mean nothing offensive, believe me," added Mr. Josceline, earnestly, "I merely allude to the difference of various modes of life; she has been brought up tenderly, and is quite unfit to rough it—if she married a poor man, I repeat, though he had the virtues of an Aristides, she would be miserable. I think I may be allowed to be a judge of this matter; but, whether or not, I intend that she shall run no risk of so marrying. Hence it is my desire to remove every obstacle that may interfere with her due establishment in life, and in my opinion—indeed, I am sure of it—this proposed connection of hers with paper and print would be an obstacle."

Felspar bowed his head; his views upon that matter, it was evident, were not to be asked. Mr. Josceline waited in hopes, perhaps, that assistance should be volunteered, but he waited in vain.

"You may naturally say to yourself, Mr. Felspar, 'What is all this to me? Why, after a few hours' acquaintanceship, does this garrulous old gentleman make me a confidant in his affairs in this entirely unsolicited manner? What do I care for him, or his daughter either?' Nay, permit me to finish"—for Felspar had been about to speak—"I said you might naturally have so expressed yourself, whereas I ought to have said you might have good reason for doing so. 'Naturally,' you never would. It is because your

nature is, I am sure, a gentle and generous one, that I ventured to make this appeal to you. You have evidently great influence with your young friend, Mr. Vernon, and if you could convey to him, less directly than I have done, my views in this matter——”

Mr. Josceline paused by design; he saw that this reference to Vernon affected his young companion more nearly than anything he had yet said; and perhaps he looked for some revelation; if so, he was doomed to be disappointed.

“But what has my friend to do with this affair, Mr. Josceline?” inquired Felspar, drily. “He is not the editor of the ‘Keepsake.’ He can neither accept nor reject your daughter’s drawing. He has no more connection with it than he would have had with the drawing of the other artist if indisposition had not prevented him from executing it.”

“That may be, Mr. Felspar, and the fact may be well understood by artists and authors. But if a picture drawn by my daughter is put in a magazine in illustration of certain verses written by Mr. Vernon, or *vice versâ*, some connection will, by the outside world at least, without doubt be taken for granted between artist and poet. I was in hopes that you would perceive this for yourself without my being compelled to make allusion to a circumstance so every way embarrassing; but it will be sufficient for my purpose I am sure that you perceive it now.”

It was Mr. Felspar’s turn to be embarrassed here; for, as a matter of fact, he had from the first foreseen, not indeed that others would have drawn any deduction from the contiguity of poem and picture, but that the fact of the two young people thus work-

ing together would induce companionship and friendship between them. Of Mr. Josceline's pecuniary position he had of course been ignorant, though he probably took for granted that gentleman's views on matrimony; but he had not deemed the disparity of fortune so insurmountable to his friend's hopes as Vernon himself felt it to be; while the chivalry of his own disposition compelled him to encourage them. In his heart he thought Ella Josceline the most glorious young creature that his eyes had ever beheld; but he had not confessed it, even to himself, and would have been slow indeed to confess it, as Vernon had done, to another. Having once been the recipient of his friend's confidence, it seemed to him that he was bound in honour to respect it even as regarded his own secret aspirations. He felt like a priest who under the seal of confession has been put in possession unawares of some design antagonistic to his own dearest interests, but which his sacred calling forbids him to oppose.

"I again repeat," continued Mr. Josceline, finding that his companion made no reply, "that no such association as I speak of in connection with the publication of my daughter's drawing may suggest itself to you. I am speaking of a class who have neither your depth, nor catholicity of thought, and whose minds are naturally inclined to personal gossip. I may claim to know them better than you do, and you must please to take the fact for granted. What I wish you to understand is, that it would not only be painful to myself but most detrimental to my daughter's prospects in life, should her name in any way be mixed up with that of this young Bohemian."

Felspar's nature was a singularly just and fair one. He had not only the faculty of placing himself in the position of others—even of his opponents—but it would sometimes assert itself in spite of his efforts to hold his own views, and it did so now. He did not agree with Mr. Josceline; he thought his sentiments artificial and his principles unsound; but he was not sure, had their places been reversed, that he would not have exhibited the same prejudices, or even been moved by the same considerations. He felt, too, that he had no shadow of right to argue with this gentleman concerning the future of his daughter. He could, in fact, hardly advocate Vernon's cause against such an objector, but his loyalty to his friend compelled him to defend his character.

"Indeed, Mr. Josceline, you are mistaken in Vernon, if, as I gather, you apply the term 'Bohemian' to him in a depreciatory sense. That he is almost entirely dependent upon his pen is true; but he has none of the faults and follies which are popularly ascribed to the literary calling. He is not reckless or extravagant, he is a man of high principle and exceptionally delicate feeling; generous and capable of self-sacrifice (as I happen to know) to an extent very rare in any of our sex, and rarest in a man so young. You pique yourself on your knowledge of your fellow creatures; but if you have read Walter Vernon's character otherwise than I have described it, you are in error."

To all this Mr. Josceline listened with patient and even rapt attention, and it was with a certain gentle earnestness that he replied, "I have not a word to say against your young friend, Mr. Felspar. He may possess all the virtues you ascribe to him; but that one

admission of yours, 'he is almost entirely dependent on his pen,' states the whole case for me in a nutshell. Even if he were a man of genius, which you must forgive me for saying he is not, though he may be a very clever young fellow, my objections to him as a suitor for my daughter's hand—I am obliged, at some risk of appearing ridiculous, to take the worst for granted—would be insuperable, and any general impression that he aspired to such a position would, as regards her prospects, be almost as bad. I should leave Wallington Bay to-morrow, at whatever personal inconvenience, if I thought such a misfortune within the range of possibility."

The idea of Mr. Josceline and his daughter departing from Wallington Bay was very painful to Mr. Felspar. He would rather have packed up his traps and taken Vernon with him (as he could have done by dropping a hint of the real state of the case) than have driven them to such an extremity. And, whether right or wrong, it was evident that his companion was in earnest and meant what he said.

"And what is it," he inquired, gently, "you would have me do, Mr. Josceline?"

"The favour I have to ask of you is this, Mr. Felspar. I wish you to take such measures as may preclude the possibility of my daughter's drawing appearing in the 'Mayfair Keepsake.' A depreciatory word from you——"

"I would not speak it for a thousand pounds," interrupted Felspar; "I hope I respect my own art too much to dream of such a baseness."

"A baseness, Mr. Felspar?" echoed his companion with a tinge of colour in his pale face. "I am not

accustomed to suggest to my friends that they should perform base actions, even to do myself a service."

"Of course not; it is only that you and I look upon this proposition with different eyes. Suppose you were a clergyman——"

"It is not necessary," observed Mr. Josceline, rising, and speaking with great haughtiness, "to argue the matter, Mr. Felspar. I have, I see, made a mistake in my judgment of your character, and I apologise for it."

"Indeed, sir, I hope you have made no mistake in that," returned Felspar in earnest conciliation, "but only in the view taken by an artist of his professional duty. I will tell you frankly that entertaining a strong interest—natural, I hope, in one of my calling—in your daughter's drawing, it had been my intention to give it the benefit of my own experience. I should have touched it here and there so as to remove certain imperfections, and in such a manner, in short, as would probably have ensured its acceptance. But now that I have heard her father's views upon the matter, it will go to the magazine as it is, and stand or fall by its own merits. I promise this upon my honour, but more than this my honour forbids me to promise."

"Mr. Felspar," said Mr. Josceline, holding out his hand, "I thank you, and for two things. First, for having granted my request so far as your conscience permits you to do; and, secondly, for a lesson in good feeling. You are quite right, and I have been quite wrong. I feel that it is superfluous to ask a man like you to treat what I have said to you in

the strictest confidence, but for my daughter's sake I do ask it."

"Indeed, sir, it shall never pass my lips," said his companion, earnestly.

"Once more, Mr. Felspar, thank you."

They shook hands warmly, and parted; Mr. Josceline making his way up hill with scarcely slower steps than Felspar descended into the village. His mind was full of thought, partly, and after a while wholly, upon his friend's account; but partly, and for the moment, his thoughts wandered unbidden to himself and Ella. If her material expectations were indeed so small, his own were comparatively great: if, as we have said, he had chosen to confine himself to the more lucrative branch of his profession, he might have made a large income, and the prospect of such a prize as Ella would, he felt, have been temptation enough to have persuaded him to such a course. At all events, even to Mr. Josceline's eyes, his prospects would not have appeared so significant—certainly not so utterly hopeless—as those of Vernon; indeed it was plain that he had made a very favourable impression on Mr. Josceline, and one which, skilfully pushed, might possibly have made him think seriously of him as a son-in-law. It was curious that the feelings of Ella herself did not enter into these reflections of Felspar; but the fact was they were excluded partly by his own humility, partly by reverence for herself, and partly by the conviction that Vernon had already made an impression on them. As a rule, young men do not think themselves old so often as old men think themselves young, but such a thing does sometimes happen; the pursuits and amusements

of the young no longer interested Felspar, though, like a veritable old man, he took pleasure in seeing them happy in their own way: his tone of thought was eminently mature, and, in comparison with Vernon, for example, it seemed to Felspar that he was a sort of Patriarch. Ella was bright and cheery as Vernon himself was, and "let like mate with like" was, ere he reached the village, the sole sentiment in Felspar's mind, though, if he had expressed it, it would not have been without a sigh.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A DOUBLE GAME.

It is the custom of the clergy to divide their congregations into the Evil and the Good, which is very convenient, and simplifies a somewhat abstruse matter exceedingly; but, unhappily, the Good—that is, the folks without evil in them (except that little modicum of original sin, which, in view of the immense amount of peccadilloes imported by mankind since that first cargo, may be disregarded)—are so very few that it is hardly worth while to address them from the pulpit at all, and more especially as they stand in no need of such exhortation. In the case of the vast majority even of church-goers, if the evil in them were represented by a black framework, as in a mourning envelope, we should see them, I am afraid, with a pretty broad border; only you and I, and half a dozen others of this congregation, perhaps, would be represented by what stationers call the "mitigated grief size"—perhaps a quarter of an inch. I suspect some

people would exhibit scarcely enough of white envelope to write their direction upon. To this last class the moralist, if not the divine, would undoubtedly have relegated the Hon. George Emilius Josceline, and especially if he could have looked into his mind after that morning's interview with Mr. Felspar, which had seemed to touch him to the very core, whereas what was uppermost in his thoughts, as he toiled up the hill towards his hotel, was the reflection that he had gained his end, and, to a certain extent, even outwitted his late companion. The artist had given his word not to put any finishing touches to Ella's drawing; "and without them," reflected this unnatural father, "I should think even this two-penny-halfpenny magazine will never admit it into its columns."

It is a sad thing to have to record of any parent that he should actually wish his daughter's mental gifts to escape recognition; but Mr. Josceline's case was not an unparalleled one. Poverty, like a distorting mirror, often makes what is fair seem foul to us. How often, for example, has a poor man cause to curse his daughter's beauty! But what made Mr. Josceline's case a bad one, rather than a hard one, was that his poverty had been brought about by his own hands, which had squandered his means in all sorts of unworthy ways. Truth to say, for all that was white on his envelope he was indebted to his daughter; that is to say, his love for her had cleared a space for itself, as it were, in the midst of his selfish recklessness, as though a dove should nestle on a rubbish heap. And, what was worst of all, though to him it did not appear so, the very plans he had in his mind for her benefit were themselves far from what they should be; he

was **fixed** on making her comfortable after his own ideas, no matter at what risk of soiling her white wings.

It may be thought that Mr. Josceline ran a great danger in reposing his confidence in a comparative stranger like Mr. Felspar; but the danger was greater than it looked. Short as his acquaintance had been with the young painter, he had gauged his character pretty accurately; and what he had heard of him—and he had made certain inquiries—had corroborated his own view. Moreover, if he were wrong; if Felspar and his friend were like most young men of their class—mere fortune hunters—the knowledge of the fact that Ella was portionless would at least put an end to all peril from that quarter, whatever mischief it might work (by the news getting abroad) in others. And, as Mr. Josceline thought, there *was* peril from that quarter. He had acknowledged to himself the attractions of Vernon (for he had been attracted, himself, towards him), and noticed the pleasure Ella derived from his society. He had thought the anxiety she had showed in connection with the adder's bite more significant even than it really was; he had been wont to see young ladies of her position take little services from young gentlemen (if they were "ineligible") very coolly, and he did not understand how gratitude affects a pure and ingenuous nature. What had, however, alarmed him more than anything was the intelligence, received from Felspar himself, that his daughter's drawing had been directly suggested to her by Vernon. He had observed the "pleased alacrity" with which she had set to work upon it the previous evening, and the diligence with which she

had proceeded with it, and had wondered at the cause. And now he no longer wondered, but feared. It was not easy to alarm a mind so well balanced—in worldly scales—as his was; but he had become of late a prey to anxiety upon this subject, and the state of his health increased it. He had come to Wallington Bay as the place best adapted for a certain plan he had vaguely had in view, and this had already taken shape. It was of extreme importance—for his time was growing short—that nothing should interfere with it; hence his recent measure of precaution. With Vernon brushed aside, the road, though difficult, would at least be clear before him.

On his way back to the hotel, Mr. Josceline met Mrs. and Miss Jennynge “going out for a promenade,” as the elder lady called it, in the grounds, for an appetite for their lunch; and with much politeness he offered to accompany them.

They accepted his offer with effusion. They congratulated themselves that they had announced their intention of not going far from home, since they had now a good cause for presenting themselves to the envious eyes of the other guests of the *Ultramarine* (some of whom had already their noses flattened to the windows) in the company of “the Hon. George Emilius,” as Mrs. Armytage was wont familiarly to speak of her new acquaintance. To lookers on, the mother on one side, the daughter on the other, were apparently engaging him in earnest conversation, though the elder lady was, in fact, the chief speaker.

“How wicked you are, Mr. Josceline,” said she, “to make poor Mr. Felspar so idle! You should not thus

misuse your social attractions; I saw you talking to him under the elm tree yonder for ever so long."

"I had no idea that your eye was upon me, Mrs. Jennynge; but even if I had known it, my conscience would not have pricked me. If I did detain Mr. Felspar for five minutes, it was only from his luncheon."

"He ought to have been at work upon my picture," said Mrs. Jennynge, with a pretence at severity.

"Ah, that, indeed, would have been a pleasant occupation!" said Mr. Josceline, gaily; then suddenly reflecting that it was not Mrs. Jennynge's portrait, but her husband's on which the artist was engaged, he added, "for it is no doubt a pleasure, though a mournful one, to embalm, as it were, the memory of the dead by one's imperishable pencil. It was upon the subject of art that we two were talking just now—or rather upon which he was talking and I was listening."

"Oh, that was it, was it?" said Miss Jennynge, with a significant glance at her mamma. "We could not think what it was that seemed to interest you both so much."

Some people would have felt annoyed at being subjected to the sort of espionage to which the young lady had confessed so naïvely, but not so Mr. Josceline; he was not surprised, and was far from being displeased at it. It not only showed that his present companions took a personal interest in him, but proved that not a point would be missed in the part he was about to play.

"To you, Miss Jennynge," he replied, "who are,

yourself, a devotee to art, no interest in that subject can appear exaggerated or misplaced."

"Well, I don't know about that," observed her mother, tartly; "Anastasia keeps her spirits up uncommonly well for a devotee."

The young lady looked up in some astonishment at this unexpected ebullition; but Mr. Josceline was not astonished. He perceived that the widow was jealous of the attention he was paying to Anastasia, of whom generally she stood in some fear.

"I don't think it is necessary, dear Mrs. Jennynge," he said, soothingly, "to be melancholy because we are devoted. In your case, for example—what is the matter?"

"Nothing; I fancied I heard that horrid Fido in our sitting room."

Mr. Josceline had also heard a dog bark; but he doubted that that had been the cause of Mrs. Jennynge's interruption. She wanted, as he guessed, to put a stop to any reference to her deceased husband, of whom in general she could never talk enough; this he thought—combined with her jealousy—was a most encouraging sign.

"Ah, Mr. Josceline!" she continued, "you gentlemen little know what we ladies suffer."

"That is your own faults," answered Mr. Josceline, gallantly. "To us you always appear so beaming that we never think of the fortitude that has enabled you to hide your sorrows." And, while he addressed his voice to Mrs. Jennynge, he suffered his eyes to rest admiringly on Anastasia.

"That is his horrid bark," cried the widow, with irritation—"I thought I could not have been mistaken.

He is shut up in our room all by himself, Anastasia, and will destroy your dear father's precious portrait. I'll just run in and let him out."

"How ridiculous mamma makes herself about that picture!" exclaimed the young lady, when Mr. Josceline and she were left alone.

"We must all have something to love, if it is but a memory," he returned, in a tone that was not only apologetic but even tender; and I am afraid, it must be confessed, that Mr. Josceline pressed—though almost imperceptibly—Anastasia's arm.

"Well, she has got *me*," returned the young lady with indignation.

Mr. Josceline was wondering within himself whether she was resenting that delicate pressure of the arm, or whether the movement had not been demonstrative enough to attract her attention.

"That is true, my dear young lady, and to most people it would be enough. To some people, indeed, it would be all sufficient. But your mother is peculiar."

"Very," assented Anastasia, sharply. "She is so imprudent, for one thing. The idea of her coming out on the terrace, here, at her time of life, without a shawl! She can never be persuaded that she is no longer young."

"Ah, that is what we old folks cling to—our youth," observed Mr. Josceline, gently. "To you, who are still in the enjoyment of it, and who possess all that makes life worth having—health, beauty, and accomplishments—you cannot understand us, Miss Jennynge."

"No, I can't," said Anastasia, flatly. "I think

mamma ought to know better than to be affecting to be my age."

"Which is three-and-twenty?" hazarded Mr. Josceline, though he judged her to be five years older at the very least.

"I am three-and-twenty next birthday," replied Anastasia, without moving a muscle.

"I thought so; I am generally pretty correct in my guesses at age," returned her companion. "I wish I were a younger man," he added, regretfully.

"A man, I have read, is as old as he feels," returned the young lady, much mollified; "a woman as old as she looks. Now my mother looks sixty if she looks a day—— But, there she comes;" and Mrs. Jennynge reappeared from the house, though, as it happened, only to call them in to luncheon.

Upon the whole Mr. Josceline flattered himself he had done a good stroke of business. It was true he had found Anastasia very resentful of the attentions he had been paying for the last day or two to her mother. It could not but be to her disadvantage that that lady should think of marrying again; but that she should so openly have hinted her disgust at any such idea—for that that was what she meant when she spoke of her mother's affecting youthfulness he was certain—was very satisfactory to him; it showed that the possibility of that lady's being married for the third time had presented itself to Anastasia, and how much more, therefore, must it have done so to the widow herself. His own little attentions to the young lady—and it must be admitted that he took some pleasure in paying them; the cajolment of young women was a habit with him, and pleased him, even

though nothing came of it, just as writing a sonnet, though not designed for publication, pleases a bard—had, indeed, been somewhat icily received, though he felt that just at last there had been symptoms of a thaw; but he had had no object in them beyond throwing her off her guard, and, if possible, diverting the suspicions of other people into a wrong direction.

In this he had been successful even beyond his hopes. For Mrs. Armytage had had her eyes glued to the window-pane of her private sitting room which commanded the terrace throughout the interview. Her exclamations of contempt at Mr. Josceline's familiarity with the widow were forcible and frequent. "How can he so demean himself? What a fool he is making of that old woman!" &c. &c.; but when Mrs. Jennynge had left him, and she observed the attentions he was paying to Anastasia, she was even still more scandalised—by Anastasia.

"What a forward minx! There is no knowing what a girl may not do with an old man if she throws herself at him like that. I think it is my bounden duty as a matron—and the only one qualified to advise that sweet young creature—to warn Miss Josceline of her father's peril."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE LOST LOCKET.

THOUGH the luncheon-bell had rung, Ella did not make her appearance at the *table-d'hôte*—a circumstance which would have annoyed and perhaps even alarmed her father, but for the fact that others also

had failed to appear there as usual. Mr. Aird and Davey were absentees, and Mr. Josceline had been informed by Mrs. Trant that his daughter had left the hotel only a few minutes before his own return thither, accompanied by the younger gentleman. Where Mr. Aird was she did not know, and it had struck her that this was the first occasion on which she had seen the little fellow out of his father's company. He had come in by himself, it seemed, and then departed almost immediately with Ella.

"I am afraid it's an elopement," observed Mrs. Jennynge, with a little giggle, as she dissected a prawn; "you really ought to have put a stop to the flirtation between those two young people earlier, Mr. Josceline."

Mrs. Armytage had it on the tip of her tongue to say, "Don't *you* talk; you've got a daughter of your own to look after;" but she restrained herself with an effort. It made her angry, however, to remark that Mr. Josceline—who perhaps felt that he owed the widow some reparation for his recent conduct to her—laughed at this sally very much.

"It would have shown more prudence in the young lady," observed Mrs. Armytage, "if she had run away with the father instead of the son. I understand Mr. Aird is immensely rich."

The observation was intentionally a disagreeable one. Mrs. Armytage had meant to give Mr. Josceline what she called a rap on the knuckles for his encouragement of those vulgar Jennynges, but she had no idea how tender his knuckles were. She had inadvertently suggested the very thing which he had been revolving in his own mind, but which he was

especially solicitous to prevent occurring to anyone else. Without so much as a wince, however, he replied indifferently, "Well; I don't much believe in the great fortune of retired Indians; one hears of their having so many laks of rupees, but it often turns out that they have a lack of pounds sterling. The day for the shaking of the Pagoda tree has gone by."

"But it had not gone by when Mr. Aird first stood at the foot of it," returned Mrs. Armytage.

"After all, *what* is money?" ejaculated Mrs. Jennynge, sentimentally.

"I should like to know what some of us would be without it?" remarked her rival, contemptuously.

Poor Mrs. Jennynge felt the dart, and also her incapacity to hold her own in single combat with her enemy; she was sorry she had spoken, but she could not let the ball rest where it had been flung—that is, in her own lap. "I mean what is money, after all, without other things to enable us to enjoy it?" she stammered out. "Without health, for instance; poor Mr. Aird—and indeed little Davey also—is a case in point."

"That doesn't militate against his being a good match," insisted Mrs. Armytage; "indeed, quite the contrary."

"What sentiments!" exclaimed Anastasia.

"Yes; it's very fine," snapped Mrs. Armytage, with the quickness and fire of a lucifer match—and by no means one of those that can "only light upon its own box"—"but all of us are not all poetry and romance like you, Miss Jennynge; it's wonderful to me—though very creditable to yourself—that you should have retained your simplicity so long."

"Well," said Mrs. Wallace, gently, in the pause that followed this onslaught—which, to say truth (in conjunction with her tight lacing and the prawns), had taken all the breath out of poor Anastasia, "for my part, the longer I live the more I like simplicity."

"Ah, but you've no girls to marry!" rejoined Mrs. Armytage, tartly.

"That's true," sighed Mrs. Wallace; her thoughts at once transporting her far from the present scene to a distant grave.

"Indeed," said Mrs. Percival Lott, taking courage from the number of her allies to cast her stone at the common enemy, "I don't see why you should take such mercenary views of your own sex, Mrs. Armytage."

"Of course not, because you've caught a husband," was the swift rejoinder; "if you were upon your promotion you would probably be looking after the loaves and fishes like any other young woman."

The suspected bride turned scarlet; nor was her confusion mitigated by the circumstance that her husband, tickled, perhaps, by some reminiscences of his courting days, broke out into a little chuckle.

"Upon my word," said Mr. Josceline, smiling, "I shall rise and fly, Mrs. Armytage, for fear it may be the time for the males to come next under your castigation."

"No, no; I have not a word to say against *them*," returned the lady addressed; "they are naturally simple, and therefore one never finds them making a pretence of being so. For my part, I don't believe in a designing man."

"You are wrong, there, madam—or rather as far

from right as it is possible you can be," said Mr. Josceline, politely. "Do you think the Professor, for instance, has never been designing?"

"Eh, what?" exclaimed that learned man, looking up from a brown study of the deepest tint, and seeing Mr. Josceline with his hand upon his half-pint of sherry; "no, I thank you, not at this time of day."

"Very likely," laughed Mr. Josceline, rising from his chair; "but a little earlier, perhaps, it was different."

And in the general peal of laughter evoked by the Professor's mistake Mr. Josceline escaped from the room with considerable self-congratulation. If Mrs. Armytage's suspicions were aroused in one direction respecting him, it was clear that they were cast asleep in another.

Meanwhile Ella is wandering by the seashore, far from the hotel (and lunch), with little Davey's hand fast clasped in hers; their eyes are fixed on the lessening sand—for the tide is rising—with eager intentness, and every piece of tangled weed and seaworn rock is being examined by them as for lost treasure.

She had found the little fellow in tears just leaving the hotel, to which he had come back from his usual morning walk only a few minutes, and in reply to her compassionate inquiry had told her his pitiful story.

"Poor papa has met with a great misfortune, Miss Josceline," he had sobbed out.

"Good heavens! But let us send him help," cried Ella, at once imagining that he had been cut off in some bay by the sea, or had fallen over a cliff and broken his leg.

"No, no; nobody can help him; I was not to tell anybody," he said; "only I am sure he would let me tell you. *You* would not steal anything that belonged to anybody else, even if you found it, would you, Miss Josceline?"

"Indeed, I hope not, my dear. But what has your father lost? His purse?"

"Oh, no; I don't think he would care for that one half as much. It is his locket with mamma's picture in it; he used to wear it on his watch-chain, you know."

Ella remembered that he wore a locket of a heart-shape in dead gold—indeed Mrs. Armytage had once made a flippant allusion to it that Mr. Aird had resented extremely—and she said so. "Now be very careful, Davey. Where did you walk to-day? I mean, which was the exact path you took up to the moment your father missed the locket?"

"Oh, it's no use, Miss Josceline. I came back along it myself, and it was nowhere to be seen. Papa thought it just possible that he might have left it at home on his dressing-table, and sent me back to look; and if it wasn't there I was to go back to him."

"But, my dear child, you have not had your lunch, and you look fagged and tired as it is."

"Oh, but I had rather go back to papa. I *must* go!"

"Very good, then I will go with you; only you shall have a bag of biscuits to put in your pocket, to eat as you go along."

Thus provisioned, off they started, beginning to examine the ground from the first moment, and keeping as closely as Davey could recollect to the path

his father had taken. The pair had ventured on a longer walk than usual, to a promontory called the Monkshead, and about half-way thither Mr. Aird had discovered his loss.

"Did you take the cliff path, or go by the sands, Davey?"

"We took the cliff path; only once we dipped down to the sands in Abbot's Creek."

"And you came back by yourself exactly the same way?"

"No; I did not come by the Creek at all, because I wanted to be quick."

"Then, depend upon it, the locket is in the Creek, Davey."

"No; papa thought not; he fancied he had seen it after we had climbed the cliff again, and it is on the cliff that he is looking for it.

"However, he may be mistaken; and, whether he is or not, we will try the Creek, because our only chance of finding the locket there is to do so at once; the tide is coming in, and if it once flows over it, it is gone for ever; whereas on the cliff it may be found at any time, and the folks about Wallington are honest people, I think, notwithstanding your father's fears, and whoever finds it is sure to bring it to the hotel."

This argument carried conviction with it even to little Davey; but the boy was tired and fagged, and his grief on his father's account had also helped to exhaust the little strength he had. Ella could judge of Mr. Aird's anxiety about the locket, from his having for the moment lost sight of the weakness of his child, in thus telling him to return to him after so long a

walk. She would have made him sit down where he was and gone on by herself, but for the necessity of having the exact route pointed out to her which his father had taken. A sudden thought, however, struck her.

"Can you ride pick-a-back, Davey?"

"Oh, yes; I often do upon papa's back, when I feel tired." So Ella knelt down and, though the path was steep and the day was hot, she took him on her shoulders, and there he sat, eating steadily through his bag of biscuits, and with his little legs clinging tightly round her neck, like the old man of the sea in the story of "Sinbad the Sailor."

For some time he went on directing her footsteps in childish contentment, but presently—his last biscuit having been disposed of—he whispered in his thin treble, "Ain't 'oo tired, Miss Josceline? I can walk now."

She was very tired, but assured him, with a kiss, that he was as light as a feather; and so she toiled on till they reached Abbot's Creek. Here she let him down, for she could not carry him down the cliff, and on the smooth and still hard sand of the bay it was easy walking for him. They looked for what they sought in vain, until they had almost reached the place where they had to ascend again, when a bright something, looking like the sparkle of the sundew, attracted her quick eye. On the very verge of the line of the encroaching sea, and far below high-water mark, was the gold locket, sticking edgeways in the sand, where it had of course fallen without the least noise.

"Oh, how glad papa will be!" cried Davey, clap-

ping his little hands; "and but for you, Miss Josceline, we should never have found it."

"You dear boy!" cried she, almost as pleased as himself at her success, and touched also with the child's manner and good feeling; "you must do one thing in return for this little service; you must not call me Miss Josceline any more, but Ella, and you must give me a kiss."

"You dear, good Ella," he said, putting up his weary-looking but happy face to meet her embrace. "Oh, how pleased dear papa will be!"

To a kind heart there is no errand so pleasant as to carry to another some good news; and leaving the child safely ensconced under the shade of a rock upon the beach, "to be left till called for," Ella at once proceeded to toil up the cliff in search of Mr. Aird.

If Mrs. Armytage, or even Mrs. Jennynge, had seen her at it, they would probably have expressed disapprobation; they would have thought it perhaps "a little imprudent" in her—if they had known her circumstances they would certainly have called it "bold"—thus to seek an interview with the widower alone; whereas the motive that was actuating Ella was simply what would have urged her in the scriptural sense to visit "the widow." To think of the desolate old man wandering on the downs yonder, looking for the lost memorial of his dead wife, touched her with pity.

In a few minutes more she had caught sight of him at no great distance, coming slowly towards her, with head depressed, and suggesting, as it seemed to her, by his very gait the distress and melancholy of

his mind. Presently he looked up, probably for the return of Davey, and perceived her waving her handkerchief towards him—a signal which the female oracle of the *Ultramarine* would have reprobated exceedingly; to her it would have seemed only one step short of “throwing the handkerchief.” The sign, as Ella intended it, was at once understood; the bowed figure straightened itself, and came on towards her at greatly increased speed.

“I have found it, Mr. Aird!” she cried, as he got within hailing distance; “your locket is quite safe.”

She held the trinket out to him, and fixing his eyes on it, without even glancing at her, he took it from her hand and pressed it to his lips. “Thank Heaven,” he exclaimed fervently, “thank Heaven!” then, turning to her with a look of tender gratitude, strange to see on his lined and dusky face, he added, “And thank *you*, Miss Josceline, who are Heaven’s messenger.”

Extravagant as were his words, it was evident they were not spoken in the way of compliment; the tears were in the old man’s eyes as he uttered them.

CHAPTER XX.

MR. AIRD'S LOVE STORY.

So intense was Mr. Aird’s emotion that Ella, unwilling to be the witness of what he might afterwards feel to be a weakness, was about to turn back and leave him; but he stopped her with a gesture of his hand.

“Do not go, dear, good young lady; you must not

go till I have thanked you. I cannot say how much sorrow you have saved me; my child told you what had happened, I conjecture, and having found the locket where I hoped, yet hardly dared to hope, I had left it, you came yourself to save him so long a walk."

"I wish I had, Mr. Aird," she answered, smiling; "but the fact is the locket was not in your room, and, as Davey seemed so distressed at the loss of it, I came back with him to look for it. I wish I could have spared him the fatigue, but he was necessary as a guide, you see; and I have left him safe enough, though very tired, poor little fellow, beside a rock in the Creek yonder."

"Then you have come all this way with him to look for this?"

"Well, it was not so very far; but my fear was that you had dropped it on the sands, as indeed you did."

"Then but for you," said the old man with a glance over the cliff, "the tide would have covered it by this time. Did you open the locket, Miss Josceline?"

"I? Certainly not," said Ella, with a little flush.

"Then, if you don't mind sitting here for a few minutes, you shall see it now; I owe it to you, or rather to myself, in explanation of the weakness I have shown, and the exhibition of which I know you would have spared me. This is the portrait of my darling wife, and the mother of my only child."

He placed the open locket in her hand. The picture it contained was the portrait of a young woman anything but beautiful; the face, indeed, was

slightly pitted with the small-pox; the blue eyes were soft and gentle, but they conveyed the idea of one who has suffered much. The expression was one of serene content, as of one who, having known what it is to live and endure, has found, deservedly, her home in heaven.

"It is a sweet-looking face indeed," said Ella.

"Yes; but not pretty. It is seldom, though I have seen it once," said the old man, softly, "that to those who have the gift of beauty, God also adds that of gentleness and goodness. When I first saw it, there was no attraction in that face for me. Her name was Edith Trenton; I went out to India with her, in the same ship, and also with her cousin, another Edith, and bearing the same surname; and that second Edith was my first love. I was a poor man then, and she was poor also; very literally her face was her fortune. The gossips on board said she had come out to India as being the best market for it. To me such talk was blasphemy, but I had no right to resent it. I felt that a union between her and me was impossible. She had been brought up in luxury, and I had nothing to offer her except my love; I therefore strove to conceal it; if I did not do so it was no fault of mine, yet I believe she guessed it. We parted at Calcutta; she and her cousin had a home there which had been offered them by her aunt, the widow of a rich civilian; and I went my way to my work, hundreds of miles up the country. I had at that time no prospects; but the chief English resident of the place where I was stationed and my immediate superior, in a few months died suddenly, and, to my astonishment and delight, I was offered his post. The delight was

mainly caused by the conviction that I was now in a position to declare my love for Edith. I wrote to her immediately announcing the good fortune that had happened to me, assuring her how in secret I had always worshipped her, explaining the reasons that had hitherto kept me silent, and expressing a hope, from certain signs I had construed in my favour, that she was not altogether indifferent to me. In case this was so, as I prayed it might be, I ventured to beg her to come to me, as I could not go to her, and I enclosed an invitation from the wife of the English chaplain of my district that she should be her guest till we were married.

“In course of post I received a letter from Edith that filled my soul with joy. She acknowledged that she had always loved me, though she protested, with what I took for woman’s coyness, that she had been in doubt as to whether her love was reciprocated. As she had now no doubt, and as she felt she could not do too much to promote my wishes in return for the happiness my letter had given her, she acceded to my proposal of coming up the country and taking advantage of the hospitality that had been offered her. She also candidly owned that her home in Calcutta was not a pleasant one, and that she felt no regrets at leaving it. I have got that letter now, dear to me as on the day when it promised me possession of my beautiful bride, but in the meantime I confess I have looked at it with other eyes. Edith Trenton arrived in due course; but imagine my chagrin and embarrassment on finding that it was not my Edith, but her cousin. I don’t suppose that any man was ever placed in circumstances so perplexing and painful; my first

duty, however, I felt, was to save an unprotected and orphan girl from the distress of mind that must ensue upon her discovery of such a mistake. Fortunately her arrival was earlier by some hours than had been expected, and the chaplain kindly rode out to me to the village where I was engaged upon my duties to inform me of it.

“‘How is she looking?’ cried I rapturously; ‘and is she not charming?’

“‘Yes,’ said he, ‘she is charming. She has a sweet expression.’

“‘But is she not beautiful?’ I reiterated, with a lover’s pride. ‘I thought you admired dark beauties.’

“‘I don’t call Miss Trenton dark,’ said he; ‘and to be candid with you, my dear fellow, I think love has blinded you to her mere physical charms; she has, however, as it seems to me, the beauty of the soul, which is far better; she sent you her dear love, and, by-the-by, she gave me this letter which she thought would give you pleasure to read as you came along.’

“The letter was from *my* Edith, wishing me every happiness on my approaching union. She herself, she said, had been married some six weeks to a Captain Pipon—which, of course, was the reason why my letter had been placed in her cousin’s hands, instead of her own. For the moment I was stunned, but all the time I was riding home—though my companion ascribed my taciturnity to a very different cause—I was schooling myself to adopt such a behaviour as should prevent this poor girl’s eyes being opened to the real state of the case. As her cousin was another’s, it did not seem to me much matter whether I was married or not; while the difference to Miss Trenton would be

prodigious. I never could send her back to Calcutta, scorned and miserable, to be the object of ridicule to society, and an unwelcome burden replaced upon the shoulders of her aunt. Moreover, although I had, as I thought, only paid her the usual attentions of a gentleman upon the voyage out, I now remembered that they had been accepted very graciously. She had doubtless taken them for more than I had intended; while I, on the other hand, had underrated her kindly feelings towards myself. I am thankful to say that from the moment when I gave her my first kiss of welcome, to that in which I pressed my lips to her dear eyes closed in death, she was never undeceived."

"You behaved well and nobly, Mr. Aird," said Ella; "and I am sure you were repaid for it."

"My dear young lady, I was repaid ten thousand fold. In a little while my wife taught me to love her for herself, and after a time to adore her. I never envied Captain Pipon his prize. Day by day, and week by week, I grew to love my Edith more and more, till Fate, jealous as it seemed that a mere mortal—and it must be owned an unworthy one—should enjoy such happiness, snatched my darling from me. Davey is all that is now left to me of her save this portrait, which your great kindness has preserved to me. I would rather have lost a limb than have been deprived of it."

To Ella, who beheld his face as it bent rapturously over his restored treasure, it was easy to believe his words.

"And did Mrs. Pipon ever know?" inquired Ella.

The old man smiled as he looked up at her.

"You are, I perceive, a daughter of Eve, after

all," he said. "Yes, she did. Of that I am sure, though no one else could have been. Neither to me, nor to any other person, did she ever breathe one word of that mistake which might have been so fatal. She was not one to boast of her triumphs. I did not need to know *you*, Miss Josceline, to be assured that all women are not like those down yonder." And he pointed disdainfully in the direction of the hotel.

"Our friends at the *Ultramarine* may be better folks at heart, Mr. Aird, than you imagine," said Ella, smiling. "It is only manner——"

"You may just as well say," interrupted the old man, impatiently, "that my lined and wrinkled face is no indication of loss and trouble—not to mention of testiness of disposition, a duplicate liver, and general unsuitableness for civilised society. Your politeness will not allow that? Well, then, you may just as well say that your own sweet face is no exponent of the gentleness and goodness of the heart within. But you look pale; I fear you are tired with your long walk; you did not, I do hope, come out before you had had your lunch?"

"I don't think that two hours of abstinence will do me much harm," replied Ella, smiling. But, in fact, though hitherto excitement had supported her, she was both fatigued and faint. "Let us go down to poor Davey, who will begin to think himself deserted."

"True; the darling boy!" said the old man, tenderly. But, though he spoke of his child, there was another who now shared his anxieties.

"No, you must not go down, dear young lady. That will be an unnecessary fatigue. Walk slowly on along the cliff, and I will join you with the child. It

is selfish of me to ask you to wait for us; but old Indians, as you must have heard, are always selfish, and I cannot deprive myself of the rare pleasure of your company."

Certainly if Mrs. Armytage had beheld him, as he thus addressed her young friend in the tenderest of tones, she would have ejaculated, "Well, I never!" at the very least. For her own part, Ella would have preferred to get home at once, where she knew her father would be waiting for her with some anxiety; but she could hardly refuse Mr. Aird so small a favour. She waited accordingly for him and Davey, her mind occupied with that strange story of the two Ediths, at which—though it had such strong points of humour about it—the manner of the narrator had overcome in her all temptation to smile.

Love, it seemed, then, was more Protean than she had imagined. It did not assume one shape only. It was not always necessary to fall over head and ears into it; you might gradually slip into it with the same result! How different Mr. Aird's experience had been from all she had heard and read of it! In what unlooked-for places, it seemed, was to be found Romance! The very last man in the world whom she would have credited with a love story was this man. How strange it was, too, that one so reticent should have thus made her his confidante, and that without laying any injunction of secrecy on her! Of course she would never tell it to any one who would speak of it again, but she knew her father was to be trusted; he was a man who could discourse upon an infinity of topics, and was therefore never driven to do so upon those which were inopportune or indiscreet. She thought she would

tell him what she had heard, for two reasons: first, because it would lead him to think kindly of Mr. Aird, in whom she herself now felt a strong personal interest; and, secondly, because the recital might make him speak of his own past and his own love. Why was it that he never spoke of her mother about whom she longed to hear, yet did not dare to inquire? What was it that sealed his lips? She had often thought of this before with a certain feeling of discomfort and apprehension. It was a subject that attracted her, but, somehow or other, one she never dared to dwell upon. The same feeling possessed her now, and it was almost a relief to her when the thread of her thoughts was broken by the appearance of Mr. Aird and Davey.

"So," said the former, softly, as soon as he recovered breath from the ascent, "I find that, though Miss Josceline went without her luncheon to-day, she took care to provide some for her little companion."

"It was not much of a lunch," said Ella laughing; "we had only some dry biscuits, had we, Davey?"

"I had some; I was so hungry that I eat 'em all myself," said the child naively; "you had none, Ella."

"Ella, indeed!" exclaimed Mr. Aird. "Why don't you say 'Miss Josceline,' Master Impudence?"

"She told me to say Ella, papa; it's prettier, and I like it far better."

"Oh, it's prettier, no doubt," laughed Mr. Aird; "very pretty! But I can imagine somebody whom you and I know, Miss Josceline, observing if she heard it, 'What a very ill-mannered, forward child!'"

The imitation of Mrs. Armytage's tone was not very accurate, but it was recognisable. Mr. Aird

generally treated her in her absence with silent contempt; but he was evidently in the best of spirits, and, as it seemed to Ella, coming out in a new character in all directions.

"Well, my dear Davey," he continued, cheerfully, "you are stepping out like a little man. I should never have guessed that you had walked twice over this ground already."

"I didn't walk back, papa; I felt very tired, so Ella carried me pick-a-back almost all the way,"

"Pick-a-back?" exclaimed the old gentleman in amazement. "What, did you *carry* the child? But I need not ask. I will not say you carried him on your shoulders, Miss Josceline, but between your pinions."

"For a gentleman who never pays compliments, as I have heard you say yourself, Mr. Aird," said Ella, laughing, "that is very pretty."

"I am glad you think so," said the old man, quietly; "but it is not a compliment, my dear young lady; for that you are an angel is the simple truth—— See, there's your father on the hotel terrace with the telescope. He is sweeping the landscape for his sunbeam."

Apparently he found it; for presently they saw him coming out to meet them.

"Mr. Josceline," said Mr. Aird, gravely, as he drew near, "I owe you an apology for having deprived you so long of your daughter's society, and if I were in your place I should not easily accept it. But she has been engaged in a work of true Christian charity, I do assure you."

"If she has done you any service, Mr. Aird, I am

sure I do not grudge you her company," was the gracious reply.

"She has done me a very great service, Mr. Josceline," answered the other, earnestly; "and, though it may be but an indifferent exchange for losing your good company even for an hour, she has made of the humble individual who addresses you a friend for life."

It was curious, though Mr. Aird had the same intention—namely, of conveying his gratitude—how different was his expression of it from what it had been to Ella herself; it had then been natural, it was now formal and stilted; notwithstanding which, strange to say, he conferred at least as much pleasure in the one case as he had in the other.

"One would be really almost inclined to think," was Mr. Josceline's private reflection, "that, after all, there is such a thing as a special Providence."

Except for a certain complacency, however, which he could not altogether banish from his countenance, he showed no sign of exultation at the way which Ella had evidently made in Mr. Aird's good graces. He even affected to treat the matter with the same light-hearted indifference with which he received—or appeared to receive—all other tidings.

"Why, Ella, you little puss," he said, as soon as they were alone, and while she was partaking of the meal of which she really stood in need in their own apartment; "what spell have you been throwing round our friend, Mr. Aird, that has thus enchanted him?"

"It is only that I had the opportunity of doing him a slight service," she answered modestly.

"It seems to have been a 'secret service,' then;

for he was evidently disinclined to talk about it," replied Mr. Josceline. "Of course, if it is anything very delicate and confidential," he added, airily, "I must not be too curious."

"Well, it *was* something delicate, or rather, which had reference to a delicate matter, papa; yet I don't think he would mind your knowing it, if it went no further." And then she told him the whole story.

"It is most interesting, I am sure, my dear Ella," was his remark when she had quite concluded—and indeed he had listened to her with a patience and attention which he seldom awarded to long narratives from anybody—"and I need not say that by me this revelation of Mr. Aird's domestic romance will be held sacred. To my mind it does him infinite credit. Gad! it must have been rather embarrassing for him when the blonde arrived (*not* 'per invoice') instead of the brunette, eh?"

"Oh, papa; don't laugh. If you had seen poor Mr. Aird's face when he was telling me about it!"

"I'm glad I didn't, my dear; it's not everybody that has your command of countenance. How very much in love the chaplain's wife must have thought him, to have described the young lady so much above her physical merits! I am not laughing now, Ella. I only allowed myself to imagine the situation for one fleeting instant. I think it was most laudable, and showed the man—for one thing—to be a thorough gentleman."

"Mr. Aird is certainly that, papa."

"It struck me so the moment I set eyes on him; his constant solicitude for his boy, too, convinced me that he had a tender heart. The poor boy is very

delicate; I should almost doubt," added Mr. Josceline, reflectively, "his ever living to grow up."

"Oh, papa; don't talk like that! It would break his father's heart. And Davey is such a charming child."

"Just so; and he is evidently as attached to you as though you were his second mother. Both father and son have excellent taste, that's certain."

"But it made me quite uncomfortable, papa, to hear Mr. Aird express his thanks; they were so out of all proportion to the service rendered."

"Such a conviction, my dear," returned Mr. Josceline, earnestly, "is the unfailing index of a generous nature. But, at the same time, it is not everybody who would have walked for miles on a day like this, and gone without their lunch, too, to oblige a comparative stranger. He feels, no doubt, as though he could never do enough for you—and quite right too."

"My dear papa!"

"The fact is, my dear Ella, you don't appreciate your own position. If a young man had done it, it would have been nothing, or next to nothing; if a girl like Miss Jennynge had done it (though, as a matter of fact, she would have seen him at York first), it would have been civil, and that's all; but for you——"

"Well, really, papa," interrupted Ella, laughing, "I don't see why the action was more meritorious in my case than it would have been in hers."

"That is just what I complain of; you do not understand your own superiority. Now, Mr. Aird, I am happy to say, did. He knows that nature intended you not to run on errands, but to have services rendered you by other people. He is a man whose judgment

I applaud, and whose virtues I revere. You may depend upon it, Ella, that man was an excellent husband."

"I feel sure of that, papa."

"He didn't fall in love with his wife, you see, at first sight—though he indulged in that folly with somebody else, which came, as it almost always does come, to nothing—but he grew to love her day by day, and year by year. That is the true secret of married happiness."

"I suppose it is," said Ella, thoughtfully. She was wondering what was the secret of her father's marriage, and whether that had resulted in happiness or not. His present vein of philosophy was altogether new to her, nor did she understand its purport.

"Then, another thing which strikes me as an important feature in Mr. Aird's case," he continued, "and which should be a lesson to all young people, is that Duty itself proved the gateway to Love, though it did not seem at first to lead thither. The whole story is, in fact, not only, as I have said, most interesting, but also most noteworthy; and now, dear, that you have had your lunch, and listened so patiently to my sermon, you can run upstairs and take off your bonnet."

Mr. Josceline had an idea that young women were more given to reflection in their own rooms than elsewhere; and he had his reasons for giving his daughter an opportunity for thinking over what he had said to her, and perhaps of giving it a personal application.

CHAPTER XXI.

ILLNESS IN THE HOTEL.

ON the way to her room, Ella met Davey's ayah—a black nurse called Abra, who, with servants at the *Ultramarine*, was the cause of as great excitement (not unmingled in their case with alarm) as were Mr. and Miss Josceline to their masters and mistresses; she looked as white as a black woman could, and in a state of extreme agitation. "Oh, mees," she cried, "Masser Davey is taken ill; I am going for his papa."

"But you have surely not left the child alone?"

"No, no; a kind lady is with him," and she pointed to the nursery door, and fled down-stairs as fast as the peculiarity of her attire—which resembled a night-dress over a dressing-gown—would permit.

By Davey's bedside was Mrs. Wallace, whom the nurse had called in to her assistance. It was not unusual for the child to be put to bed in the day-time, but on this occasion it was clear that he was not fit to be anywhere else; his little face was pinched with pain, and his little hands like coals of fire.

"I am better now," he answered to Ella's affectionate inquiry; "but I was cold and my teeth did chatter so that Abra was frightened. Now I'm quite warm."

Mrs. Wallace and Ella interchanged meaning looks. "Davey is a little over-tired," said the former, assuringly; "papa will come up and kiss him, and then he will go off to sleep, and wake up quite well."

"My head, my head!" moaned the little patient, whom this agreeable programme seemed utterly to fail to cheer.

"Is it fever?" inquired Ella in a whisper.

"Yes; no doubt. I think, dear Miss Josceline, if you sent for Dr. Cooper at once it would be our best plan."

"Let Ella stay here; I like Ella," murmured the child. "I like you too, Mrs. Wallace," he added, and it was plain the effort to be thus considerate cost him something; "but Ella is so pretty."

"He is quite right," said Mrs. Wallace, smiling. "It would be a waste to send Ella on a message when an ugly old woman like me could do it just as well; would it not, Davey?"

"'Es it would," said Davey. And the kind old face (which had beauty in it too—for wiser eyes) gave place to the young one beside his pillow.

She returned presently with the ayah, and the news that Mr. Aird had gone out immediately after luncheon, and was not to be found. It was unusual for him to do so; but, as Ella guessed, his feelings having been deeply moved by the recital of the morning, he had probably preferred to pass an hour or two somewhere in solitude.

The child dropped into an uneasy slumber, in which he continued till the Doctor came. Mrs. Wallace explained to him in a few words what had happened, and then he proceeded to make his professional examinations.

Davey cried a little on being woke—which with him was itself a sign of mischief, for the child was not given to tears—but presently dropped off again.

"What is it, Doctor?" whispered Mrs. Wallace.

"If you want a name for it, my dear madam," was the reply, "I could give you half a dozen very

fine ones; but, the fact is, one cannot tell what is the matter yet. We shall know better in a few hours. Whatever it may be that threatens him, he is very delicate, and will want careful and intelligent nursing"—and he looked doubtfully at the ayah.

"I am an excellent nurse," said Mrs. Wallace; "or, at all events," she added, with characteristic modesty, "I ought to be, if experience is of any value."

"It is of inestimable value," said the Doctor; "but have you no one to ask leave of in the matter?"

"Not in a case like this," she answered confidently. "My husband, I know, will have but one answer to such a request."

"Ella, Ella! don't leave me, Ella!" moaned the sick child, in a half dream.

"She is here, my darling," said Ella, softly, and was leaning down to kiss him, when the Doctor interposed.

"Do not do that, Miss Josceline. There is no knowing what mischief may be in store for the little lad; though, on the other hand," he added, with sudden cheerfulness, "after a few hours' refreshing sleep he may wake up quite himself again."

This last sentence was put in very dexterously. He had heard a hurried footstep behind, and guessed rightly to whom it belonged, namely to Mr. Aird himself.

The ex-Commissioner's face was a picture of woe and terror, and, as he stood at the foot of the little bed, he looked five years older than he had looked a few hours before.

"Do not wake him, Mr. Aird," said the Doctor;

"the less excitement he has the better; while sleep is, on the other hand, the best of medicines."

"But you were speaking of mischief," returned the other, in an anxious whisper. "What is that you fear for my—my darling!"

"Well; he has, in my judgment—they may pass off, you know, but still he has them—some premonitory symptoms of fever."

"What! Scarlet fever?"

"Hush! pray control yourself, Mr. Aird, or you will do harm where you would most repent it. I don't know what fever at present; but, as it may be of a contagious kind, I had just forbidden this young lady to kiss the child."

Mr. Aird turned his eyes to Ella, and apparently became conscious of her presence for the first time; his face wore a look of confusion so much more than of recognition even then, that the Doctor proceeded to explain matters.

"These two ladies," he said, smiling, "I found like a couple of angels, guarding this little fellow's pillow. Mrs. Wallace here, having, she tells me, had experience in illness, has kindly volunteered to nurse him. He will want nursing, and I cannot say I have any very responsible person to recommend in the village."

"God bless you!" said Mr. Aird, fervently, his eyes glancing gratefully at Mrs. Wallace, and then reverting to his child's face.

"There must be another sick nurse also," continued the Doctor, "whom I can provide; though I could hardly have put her in sole charge. It is a pity she is not younger, because with young people——"

"Ella! don't leave me, Ella!" repeated Davey, in the same half unconscious, half pleading tones.

"I am not going to leave you, darling," she replied; then turning to the Doctor, she added, "You see the child has a fancy for my presence, Dr. Cooper, which in his state I am sure should not be crossed. It is true that I am unaccustomed to nursing—or, indeed, to do anything useful—but I am most willing, and you must let me try my best."

"It would never do, Miss Josceline," answered the Doctor; "it would place too great a responsibility upon my shoulders. Mrs. Wallace, having her husband's consent in the matter, is her own mistress; but you don't know what you are asking. At this very moment I have my doubts whether I ought not to order you from the room."

"Do you think I am afraid of the fever?" inquired Ella, scornfully.

"I am sure you are not," said the Doctor, patting her on the shoulder. "You look to me as if you would be afraid of nothing except doing wrong."

"And that I should be doing if I left this child after he has asked me to stay and nurse him," said Ella, earnestly. "See how his little hand clasps mine!"

The Doctor could see it; but Mr. Aird could not, because his eyes were filled with tears.

"But, my dear young lady," said the Doctor, "you are not, I repeat, like Mrs. Wallace, here, the mistress of your own actions. Your father, whom I have the honour to know, must be consulted in the matter; and I honestly tell you that, in my opinion, he would be fully justified in saying 'No.' Mr. Aird himself will, I am sure, take the same view." For the first time

the old Indian removed his anxious eyes from the sleeping boy, and fixed them elsewhere—on Ella.

“Miss Josceline,” he said, “I feel your kind offer as I do that of Mrs. Wallace; my heart is too full to express how much. In her case, I accept it; in yours, I dare not. If anything should happen to you through—through Davey—— She has no business to be here, Doctor, as it is, has she?”

“She has not,” replied the Doctor, decisively.

“Hush!” said Ella, “would you have me wake the child? Do you not see he has his hand in mine?”

Nothing more was said just then on that point. Dr. Cooper objected to the room as being too small in case of sickness, and recommended the little patient’s removal into another apartment; and, having left divers other directions behind him, presently went home to make up his prescription.

In the meantime the news that Davey Aird had been taken ill, with a fever that might possibly prove infectious, spread, with the swiftness of contagion itself, over the whole house. Mrs. Trant, the landlady, though secretly almost beside herself with apprehension, maintained her usual philosophic demeanour, and made arrangements for preparing the Prior’s room, as it was called, for the patient’s reception; it formed one of two or three apartments, entitled the “Hostel,” cut off by a long passage from the rest of the house, and practically isolated from it. Even if it should please God to visit the child and her own establishment with such a calamity as scarlet fever—which was far from being likely, for the place was health itself—all danger, she averred, would be confined to that locality.

This view of the case, however, it was difficult for Mrs. Trant to persuade her guests at the *Ultramarine* to share. Mrs. Armytage—who, however, was no coward, and did not dream of flight—expressed her opinion that scarlet fever the malady would turn out to be, nor was it to be wondered at that a child who was allowed to sit down to a late dinner with grown-up people every night should sooner or later have contracted some such malady.

On the other hand, Mrs. Jennynge immediately began to pack up; the idea of infection suggested death, which even the prospect it afforded of her being reunited to her beloved Nathaniel failed to rob of its terrors. Her daughter said nothing either for or against departure; the peril did not much alarm her; and if the report was true that Miss Josceline, for some inscrutable reason of her own, had volunteered to be the child's sick nurse, she hoped in her absence to regain that supremacy as "leading young lady" in the hotel drama of which Ella's arrival had undoubtedly robbed her. Moreover, she knew that the case was one in which opposition could have been of no avail. In some things—mostly small ones—her mother was submissive to her; in others she was not to be guided; and having the absolute charge of the purse strings, was far less to be coerced.

The suspected bride was not inclined without good reason to leave her present quarters. It was not often that she had the opportunity of dining every day with an Honourable; and Mr. Josceline, who had a very pleasant way with all ladies, and especially with young and pretty ones, was really a favourite of hers. If small-pox had been in the air she would have fled

within the hour; but scarlet fever, at the worst, did not disfigure one.

As for the gentlemen, the Professor had been for weeks in search of a butterfly with green wings, reported by the "Entomologist" to be in the neighbourhood of Wallington, the pursuit of which had already entailed on him several severe colds, an acute attack of rheumatism, and a sprained ankle, and whose capture would have more than repaid him for fifty fevers. Mr. Percival Lott was not a man to trouble himself about diseases of any kind; and provided that no epidemic was so virulent as to deprive the billiard table of its usual complement of pool players, it was free, so far as he was concerned, to run its course, and welcome. Mr. Wallace had a cheerful confidence that Emma (his wife) knew what she was about, and might be safely left to the guidance of her own judgment; if she thought it right to nurse the little lad, it was sure to *be* right. And as for infectious disorders—with the exception of the foot-and-mouth disease, with which it appeared nobody was threatened—they were the Doctor's business, and not his.

Mr. Josceline—who, thanks to the dignity of his position, was the last to be informed of the impending calamity—had it broken to him in a very unexpected manner. Ella's prolonged delay above stairs had not disturbed him; indeed, he was rather pleased at it than otherwise, for he flattered himself she was giving her attention in her own apartment to the subject he had so delicately dropped into her mind. He was solacing himself for her absence with smoking cigarettes and perusing his favourite author, when there was a knock at the door—much louder than that modest tap

which Phœbe the neat-handed was wont to administer—and in walked Dr. Cooper. Mr. Josceline honestly liked the man, and also, situated as he was, felt the advantage of making friends with him in many ways.

"I am delighted to see you, Doctor," he said, "and the more so because I don't want you—I mean professionally. This is really kind."

"I am sorry to say, however, Mr. Josceline," returned the other smiling gravely, "that my visit has a professional character. The fact is—though the danger may pass away—the *Ultramarine* is threatened with something very serious—a case of fever."

"Drains, of course," replied Mr. Josceline. "All these old houses are deficient in their sanitary arrangements."

"I don't know the cause at present, though I don't think it is anything local; little Davey Aird is down with some sort of fever."

"I am truly sorry to hear it, both for his own and father's sake." And for the moment Mr. Josceline was really sorry. He had, it is true, speculated vaguely in his own mind upon delicate little Davey's being removed from this world of sorrow; but many of us do the like without actually wishing the object of our calculations any harm.

"Yes; Mr. Aird is, of course, dreadfully distressed and anxious. My errand here, however, concerns you more nearly. When the child was taken ill it seems your daughter was called to his assistance; and she is even now by his bedside."

"Good gracious! But is not that dangerous?"

"Well; let us hope not. I will not conceal from you, however, that she has incurred—*has* incurred, mark me—a certain risk, although a small one."

"But why, in Heaven's name, does she not come away?"

"Well; the fact is, she is stopping there—in Heaven's name; that is, out of her natural goodness and kindness of heart. The child is evidently attached to her, and she is loth to leave him. Mr. Aird, of course, is deeply grateful, but is sufficiently unselfish to regard the matter from what, I presume, will be your own point of view. She has volunteered with that excellent Mrs. Wallace—who, between ourselves, is worth all the other women here put together, though they think her such small beer—to nurse the child. That is, of course, with your permission. If the case should turn out to be a serious one, there will be undoubtedly risk. But in that event, as I have said, some risk has been already incurred by her having been in such close proximity with the little patient."

"Has Mr. Aird sent you to ask my leave?"

"Nay, I cannot say that; it would have been highly improper of him, in my opinion, to make such a request; your consent, of course, would lay him under an eternal obligation; but I have come, as was my duty, to learn for myself your view of the matter. It is for you, and you only, to decide. The actual peril, though very appreciable, is, after all, remote; but it will very likely become necessary to isolate the case, and thereby deprive you for some time of Miss Josceline's society. Mr. Aird's last words to me were, 'It is too much to ask of anybody;' and it is certainly a great deal to ask."

Mr. Josceline turned away from his companion—an act of discourtesy which, unless in anger, he had never committed in his life—and gazed thoughtfully out of

the open window, as though seeking the reply that was expected of him from sky and sea.

"In case I accede to this," he answered, presently, "is my daughter to be removed from me now, from this moment? Am I not to see her?"

"Of course, Mr. Josceline, I cannot prevent your seeing her, but I think it would be highly injudicious. At present we know the extent of probable infection, if infection there should be. It is limited to four persons; for doctors, you know, are like Old Bailey attorneys, who notwithstanding the immorality of their clients, always remain pure and good, neither catching anything themselves nor communicating it to others."

That Mr. Josceline had no smile for this, showed how deeply he was moved by the thoughts within him.

"I owe it to Mrs. Trant and to her lodgers," continued the visitor, "that the danger should be minimised as much as possible. I would prefer you not to see Miss Josceline—since to do so would give me another cause for anxiety—unless you have resolved to forbid her to carry out her present intention. If, on the other hand, you are prepared to permit it——"

"I *am* prepared," interrupted Mr. Josceline, suddenly. "I have quite made up my mind. I think it would be wrong of me to step between my daughter and an act of Christian charity. Tell her, with my dear love, that she has my full permission to nurse the child."

The other gazed at him with an admiration that was not, however, unmixed with some surprise.

"Such a determination does you honour, Mr. Josceline; it is one that few fathers—with a daughter

so dear to them, as I know Miss Josceline is to you—could have brought themselves to entertain. She will, I am sure, be most grateful for your consent; and as for Mr. Aird——”

Mr. Josceline waved his hand as though that consideration was of small consequence indeed, as compared with other matters, and also to indicate that he wished to be alone—as, indeed, he did.

“I will leave you, sir,” continued the Doctor, gravely, “to your own thoughts, which should be happy ones if the reflection of having performed a noble and unselfish action can give happiness.” And with a cordial grasp of his large hand he left Mr. Josceline to his meditations.

These were not altogether of the kind that his visitor had anticipated; though, on the whole, as he had hinted, they conferred considerable satisfaction.

“I am right, I am surely right,” murmured Mr. Josceline to himself; “such an opportunity as this should not be let slip. My time is short; the risk is small; the prize is great.”

CHAPTER XXII.

THE INVITATION.

THE company at the *table d'hôte* that day were much diminished in numbers. Some intending lodgers who had arrived at the hotel, on hearing that there was risk of fever, had instantly taken their departure, so that there were no new recruits; while the absence of Ella and of Mr. Aird and of his son from one side of the table, and of Mrs. Wallace from the other, made very melancholy gaps. Felspar and Vernon, in con-

sequence of the latter's ailment, also failed to present themselves, so the guest-roll at the *Ultramarine* was limited to eight persons. This, however, had the effect of making them more like a family party than ever, while the subject of conversation, being of course little Davey's illness, drew them in some respects still nearer together by reason of its unusual seriousness. The degrees of acquaintanceship vary less in proportion to the frequency of meeting than of our common interest in the matters discussed. This circumstance, it is true, did not mitigate the hostile feeling between Mrs. Armytage and Mrs. Jennynge; they were Irreconcilables, and would have quarrelled on the same raft after a shipwreck; but it made the relations with each of these ladies and the rest of the party decidedly more close and familiar. All, too, were agreed that the conduct of the grand-daughter of the Earl of Boroughby in exposing herself to the dangers of infection for the sake of little Davey was above all praise. Miss Jennynge was especially loud in her commendations, which were also so far genuine that she thought Ella could not have done better than have thus cut herself off from society, and left her (Anastasia) in possession of the field.

"I only hope," said Mrs. Armytage, "that Miss Josceline will find herself repaid; but I am afraid our Indian friend is not very gracious, while the poor child—though, indeed, it is not his fault—is sadly spoilt, and likely to turn out a very troublesome patient."

"I hope," said Mr. Josceline, smiling gravely, "that my daughter has no expectation of any reward save that which is derived from the consciousness of having done her duty."

"I am sure she has not," said Mrs. Jennynge, eagerly.

"Goodness gracious! what other expectation could she have?" observed Mrs. Armytage, sharply. "The impudence of the woman," as she afterwards expressed it, in thus volunteering a corroboration of Mr. Josceline's sentiments, "really surpassed everything."

"And in acknowledging Miss Josceline's goodness," continued Mrs. Jennynge, bent on recommending herself to the attention of the brother of the Earl of Boroughby, "we must not forget the self-sacrifice which her father has shown in the matter. He has not only exposed his daughter to a frightful risk, but voluntarily deprived himself of her society."

"In that respect Mr. Wallace has sacrificed himself as much as I have," said Mr. Josceline, modestly.

"Whatever my wife thinks it right to do *is* right," observed the farmer, simply, "and ought to satisfy me."

"Very proper," "a very sensible observation," "just so," murmured the company. They had no objection to Mr. Wallace entertaining such noble sentiments, or any others; but the idea of his supposing his case to be a parallel one with that of the Hon. George Emilius Josceline struck them as absurd to the last degree. Earl's grand-daughters are rare, while the supply of farmers' wives (should anything happen to one of them) is practically unlimited.

"I have just heard from Dr. Cooper," continued Mr. Wallace, "that both Mr. Felspar and Mr. Vernon offered their services to him to help nurse the little fellow."

"Deuced kind of them," muttered Mr. Percival Lott, twirling his moustaches. "Let us hope they were not

moved to play the part of Good Samaritans by the fact that Miss Josceline had undertaken that of Miss Nightingale."

"For shame, Percy!" exclaimed the suspected bride; "Mr. Josceline will hear you."

As a matter of fact that gentleman *had* heard him, and, though not a muscle of his countenance betrayed the fact, had done so with considerable interest. Had Mr. Percival Lott winged his random shaft aright, he wondered? If so, he had not taken his own precautions in vain as respected Mr. Vernon; and it might be necessary to take others. His hope was, however, that by the time Ella had finished her engagement as nurse she might have entered into another—of another kind—which would render any further attentions on the part of the young contributor to the "Mayfair Keepsake" superfluous.

"I think if Mr. Felspar offered his services to nurse little Davey," observed Mrs. Jennynge, indignantly, "it was very improper of him."

"One would think you were his mother," ejaculated Mrs. Armytage. "He is old enough to do as he pleases, I suppose."

"I said nothing about age, Mrs. Armytage," answered Mrs. Jennynge, trembling with indignation. "It is true I am not—as you are so polite as to suggest—his mother; but I am his employer. He has undertaken to do a certain work for me which it would be quite impossible for him to accomplish if he became a sick nurse."

"But we thought all that was over," returned Mrs. Armytage, bluntly.

"All what was over?" exclaimed her rival, shaking like an autumn leaf, and, like it, exceedingly red,

"Why, everything. We heard that you were going away, bag and baggage; frightened out of your wits at the idea of catching the scarlatina."

Poor Mrs. Jennynge looked as if she had caught it already; yet she felt a sense of relief, too, for when Mrs. Armytage had said "we thought all that was over," she had had a dreadful apprehension that she was referring to something more serious than her mere departure, and the idea of which she had secretly begun to entertain in her mind.

"We hear a great many things that are not true," she observed, with dignity; "but people of good sense do not repeat them."

"Hoity toity!" exclaimed Mrs. Armytage, laughing; "what a fuss about nothing! Are you going to run away from us, or are you not?"

"I have really not quite made up my mind," answered Mrs. Jennynge.

Upon the whole she preferred Mrs. Armytage's manner when it was downright rude, as in the present case, to when it was merely aggravating; and, moreover, there was a certain reason which caused her to feel satisfaction at having had the fact thus publicly extracted from her, that she was still in doubt as to leaving the hotel. On Mr. Josceline this news had a contrary effect; he had not heard that Mrs. Jennynge had any intention of quitting the *Ultramarine*, and the bare possibility of it discomposed him exceedingly. He contrived, as the ladies left the room, to have a few words with the last of them, who, in the order of exit, was naturally Miss Jennynge.

"I hope this is not true," he said, with marked

concern, "about your mother's thinking of taking you away from us?"

"I am sure I don't know, Mr. Josceline," she answered, with a little pout; "you heard what she said just now. She is still, it seems, in a state of indecision."

"But you don't wish to go, yourself, I'm sure—or, at least, I hope." And Mr. Josceline looked down and sighed, as if he had been five-and-twenty, and had said too much.

"Well, of course I don't; but in matters of this kind I have no influence with my mother whatever, I do assure you. Now I think a word from *you*."

"From *me*!" Mr. Josceline looked more surprised than he could express. "Oh, dear, if you think *that*, I will certainly speak. I confess, my dear Miss Jennynge, I am quite unscrupulous, and actuated solely by selfish motives."

"*You* selfish? When you have deprived yourself of your daughter's society to benefit others?"

"Yes; but then I thought I should have had it in some measure made up to me; I flattered myself that you and your mother, for instance, would have made a great deal of me now that I was left alone; that I should be honoured with more of your society; and as for your running away from the hotel and leaving me to the tender mercies of Mrs. Armytage, such an idea never entered into my head. It is what the newspapers call 'A Case of Heartless Desertion.'"

"Well; I'll tell mamma what you say," said Anastasia.

"Do," said Mr. Josceline, boldly; "and I hope," added he, in lower tones, "that I shall not want a kind

word from yourself; the kindest you can utter will be 'Stay,' remember."

"I'll ask mamma," said Anastasia, blushing—the phrase she was employing, perhaps, suggested to her the occasion on which it is generally used; and really Mr. Josceline's tone and manner were at once so tender and polite that he seemed to be offering his hand and heart to her upon a silver salver.

Of the manner of his address, however, she said nothing in speaking to her mother, but only conveyed to her the substance of it.

"Mr. Josceline," she said, "seems very much amazed at our going away, and says he quite depended on seeing more of us now that he has deprived himself of his daughter's society."

"Dear me, you don't say so!" replied Mrs. Jennynge, unable to conceal her delight. "I must say that is very complimentary to us, Statty."

"He is a gentleman of good birth," answered the young lady, "and of course appreciates natural refinement. He sees we are very different—indeed, he said as much—from Mrs. Armytage and Mrs. Lott, and the rest of them. That is only natural. Still, I must confess it is satisfactory."

Mrs. Jennynge cautiously abstained from saying how very satisfactory she herself felt it to be.

"No doubt, no doubt, my dear," she answered; "and since he is alone, and seems as it were to expect it, I think it would be only civil to ask him to take coffee with us this evening here, in our own apartment."

Anastasia looked about her a little doubtfully. One may have the most dutiful and domestic instincts, and

yet exercise an independent judgment upon the personal appearance of a parent in a picture or plaster of Paris; and it struck Miss Jennynge that the collection of portraits of her papa, and especially that cast of him behind the screen, was somehow not calculated to impress the Hon. George Emilius Josceline favourably. If her mother began talking to him about them in the usual way, she felt that he would be very far from appreciating it.

"I think it would be only kind to ask Mr. Josceline, mamma," she answered; "only, being still a comparative stranger to us, I think it would be injudicious to show him—as you showed his daughter—all these memorials of dear papa; it would look as if we were anxious to place ourselves on a footing of familiarity—as, indeed, we are, you may say, but then I don't know whether such a course of conduct would not in his case have just the contrary effect."

Anastasia's arguments were slightly confused; and, indeed, she felt some delicacy, as well as difficulty, in expressing them; but, to her great relief, her mother appeared to appreciate the force of them.

"You are right, Anastasia," she said; "I will not take Mr. Josceline into that sacred spot"—by which phrase she indicated the folding screen which concealed the *post-mortem* presentment of her husband's features. "His sweet daughter appreciated the tender privilege I accorded to her, and sympathised with me to the uttermost; but men are so different."

"Very true, mamma," said Anastasia, with that sense of relief which we all experience when those who, by the inscrutable arrangements of Fate, have the whip hand of us, show themselves more amenable

to reason than we had expected of them. "I suppose we had better write Mr. Josceline a little note?" She said "we" because she was generally her mother's amanuensis on such occasions; for spelling, though we are told it comes by nature, does not come all at once; but, like gentlemanliness, commonly takes more than one generation for its perfection. To Mrs. Jennynge the longer words of our language were like fences, which her pen could not take at a run, but had to compass with caution and with the help of a dictionary.

It was somewhat to the younger lady's surprise, therefore, that her mother replied, "I will write the note to Mr. Josceline myself, Anastasia, and, in the meantime, just take down a volume or two from the book-case and arrange them on the table—the 'Book of Birth and Beauty,' and 'Whither we are Going'—it will make the room look more like home to him."

While this judicious selection of literature was being made for Mr. Josceline's entertainment, that gentleman was sitting in his own apartment with a letter from Ella in his hand, which had just been brought in to him by the neat-handed Phœbe.

"I'm feared it smells of smoke, sir," she said; "but Mrs. Trant she took it from the young lady with the tongs, and held it ever so long over the still-room fire."

"To disinfect it, I suppose? quite right, Phœbe," said Mr. Josceline, gravely, "but in future, if your mistress would smoke a cigarette over it as I am doing, it would be a safer plan—I mean as regards the letter."

"I'll tell her, sir," returned Phœbe, stolidly. "And,

please, sir, I was to say as Miss Josceline was looking quite well, and didn't expect to catch nothing."

"I hope she will, nevertheless," was Mr. Josceline's reflection, as he opened the dispatch.

"My dear papa, how ever can I thank you enough," it began, "for sparing me to nurse Davey? If you could see his pleasure — though I am sure I don't know why the child should have taken such a fancy to me—it would well repay you for the loss of my poor society; while, as for Mr. Aird, his gratitude is such that I feel almost afraid of his going down on his knees."

Here a smile of content stole over the reader's face, and he dropped the letter on his lap, and reclining in his arm-chair gazed on the curling smoke of his cigarette, as was usual with him in moments of reflection.

"Mrs. Wallace is worth her weight in gold, and it is all I can do to secure my fair share of what little work is required of us. She and I occupy what is called the Prior's parlour, which opens into the dormitory, an airy room where little Davey is located with the ayah. Our plan is to take a night-watch alternately; for Abra, though an excellent creature, has 'an exposition of sleep' upon her, she tells us, which lasts for eight or nine hours on a stretch, and is not easily broken into. On the other side of the room there is the refectory, where we are to take our meals; and beyond that is Mr. Aird's room, which, at present, however, he has shown no intention to inhabit. It is impossible to get him away from Davey's pillow, though Mrs. Wallace promises it shall be done in due time: it is curious what a force of will has

suddenly developed in her—quite as strong as is exhibited by another lady of our acquaintance—but only exercised as it seems, in her case, in behalf of others. You may be quite sure, dear papa, that with good Mrs. Wallace I am in safe hands. Nothing troubles me but the thought that you may miss me a little bit, though I know how proud and pleased everybody will be to make much of you; Mrs. Wallace tells me you are such a favourite with all the ladies here that I feel quite jealous. Dr. Cooper has called again, but can say nothing decisive yet; to see poor Mr. Aird hanging upon his words and looks, is quite pitiful. I shall write you a bulletin daily—let us hope there will be but few of them—and I need not say that the greatest blessing to me in quarantine will be a letter from your dear self.

“Your loving daughter,

“ELLA JOSCELINE.”

“That is a good girl,” muttered Mr. Josceline; “not one in a thousand is like her; no, nor one in ten thousand. To come of such a stock, too! Bah! what rubbish people talk of birth and blood! Not that I ought to blame them—the idiots. What, *another* bulletin, Phœbe?”

“No, sir; leastways, I don’t know, sir,” returned the waitress, simply, “unless you mean a billy-doo; it’s from Mrs. Jennynge. I was to say you were not to trouble to write, but just to say ‘Yes,’ or ‘No.’”

“Very good; my compliments, then, and say, I shall have great pleasure.”

It was not often, although so prodigal of smiles in company, that, when he was alone, Mr. Josceline indulged himself in them; but on this occasion he

leant back in his chair with Mrs. Jennynge's open note in his hand, and fairly shook with inward merriment.

"Dear Mr. Josceline,—The absence of your charming daughter must be my excuse for asking you to do us the honour of taking coffee with us this evening. Since you are absolutely alone, you may find our society a relief; at least, I myself have sometimes discovered that anything is preferable to solitude and the recollections of the past. I am especially hopeful to see you this evening, since it may be the last—though we have not *quite* made up our minds upon that subject—that we may spend at Wallington Bay. I shall leave it with much regret; but, on the other hand, I hardly like to expose my dear and only Anastasia to the risk of contagion. You have permitted your sweet daughter, it is true, to expose herself to it, but at her own request, and in the sacred cause of duty. Anastasia's case is different, and I scarce know what to do; there was a time when I had no need to seek for advice, but had it voluntarily proffered by the best of husbands. There is none, alas! to help me in my doubts and troubles now. However, I have no right to intrude such sorrows upon the ear of—I had almost written a stranger, but I must permit myself to substitute—of so recently acquired a friend as yourself. I forget, I am ashamed to say, whether you take cream or hot milk with your coffee, so have ordered both.

"Yours faithfully,

"JANE JENNYNGE."

"By Jingo, Phœbe was right, and it *is* a *billet doux*," murmured Mr. Josceline, softly. "Things are taking a

most convenient turn, and in the very nick of time. Pah! How her note smells of india-rubber! And what a lot of erasures there are in it! The pen-knife must have been instigated, I should imagine, by the dictionary. The whole appearance of the thing reminds me of the 'holiday-letter' one wrote at school under the master's eyes; but the composition is *sui generis*, and certainly intended for no eye but mine. What an old fool she is! Never mind," he sighed—and his gaze fell on the note he had received from Ella—"it is for *your* sake, my darling; and I do not grudge the sacrifice."

And with a glance in the mirror over the mantelpiece, and another at his "filbert" nails, he repaired to the widow's sitting room.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE WIDOW'S RING.

THOUGH young people of both sexes think a good deal about love, they absolutely decline to consider its existence possible between persons of mature age. They admit that the contemporaries of their grandfathers and grandmothers may entertain a tender passion for *them*, and they have even been known to reciprocate it; but they flout the idea of those ancient people having a tenderness for one another. Hence I sometimes flatter myself, when I am inclined to flirt with some young person a third of my age and undoubtedly three times as good-looking, that I am driven to that course of conduct from fear of ridicule. One must flirt with somebody; and though it would be more becoming to select a contemporary, I dare not

do it, from dread of what the young folks will say, but pay my attentions to the prettiest girl I can find as a *pis aller*.

Miss Jennynge had no more idea that Mr. Josceline aspired to her mother's hand, when he accepted her invitation that evening, than that he had a design of possessing himself of the cast of her father's head, or of the collection of his photographs; though she herself would not have objected to becoming his wife for a few years, and the Hon. Mrs. George Emilius Josceline for ever. And that astute gentleman had possessed himself of this tender secret, which she believed to be hidden in her virgin bosom from every eye.

This knowledge, while it imposed upon him considerable difficulties, gave him a great advantage. He knew that any attention he paid to Anastasia would be set down by Mrs. Jennynge to his desire to avert her daughter's suspicions, while her daughter herself would take them *au sérieux*. The killing of two birds with one stone was a metaphor altogether too feeble for this masterly course of conduct. If Mr. Vernon had known of the position—which would have been excellent “copy” for him—he would have likened it to getting the self-same article accepted (and paid for) by “Punch” and the “Pulpit.”

“We're so glad you're come!” exclaimed Mrs. Jennynge, as she gave him her well-jewelled hand; “it is so thoughtful and kind of you.”

Thoughtful it might have been, though hardly in the sense in which Mrs. Jennynge intended it. The fact was, the excellent old lady was rather off her head with excitement, and used the first gracious

terms that came into it; but the kindness was surely the other way, as Mr. Josceline hastened to say.

"It is very kind of you and your daughter," he answered, "to take pity upon my loneliness."

"We are lonely ourselves," said Anastasia, "for now that Miss Josceline has gone there is no attraction for us in the ladies' drawing-room. Mrs. Armytage is more intolerable than ever. You noticed, no doubt, how insolent she was at dinner; well, she has been in tears half the afternoon. Can you possibly guess why, Mr. Josceline?"

"Well, I should hope it was because she heard the rumour of your possible departure."

"Not she," said Mrs. Jennynge, at which somewhat blunt sally Mr. Josceline smiled as though it had been the subtlest of epigrams.

"Mrs. Armytage has found in a book from the circulating library," continued Anastasia, "a passage which has affected her most distressingly."

"Dear me; from one of the poets, no doubt," said Mr. Josceline; "a delicate nature like hers must be easily unstrung by poetic suggestion."

"What a wicked man you are!" smiled Mrs. Jennynge admiringly. "A little bird told me you would be very severe when you pleased, though I refused to believe it."

It was evident from the colour that came into Anastasia's face that she was the bird in question, but she pursued her narrative without taking any notice of this little digression.

"No, it was not a poetry book" ("Poetry book!" thought Mr. Josceline; "she's worse than the other!"); "it was a paragraph from some work on natural history

about the duration of life in animals. 'The rhinoceros,' she told us, 'exists for ever so long, the alligator, except from over-eating itself, scarcely knows what it is to die, but the dog—the faithful dog—attains but rarely to twenty years of life.' According to that computation, her 'own sweet Fido,' as she calls him, has, it seems, only about fifteen years of existence before him, which has put her in a most dreadful state."

"No wonder," said Mr. Josceline; "fifteen years—why, it's a mere span." His tone was more cynical even than he intended, for he was thinking of "the probabilities" of the duration of his own existence.

"I had it on the tip of my tongue," continued Anastasia, "to ask the woman how long she expected to live herself."

"That would have been very rude, Statty," said Mrs. Jennynge reprovingly. "Don't you think so, Mr. Josceline?"

"Well, it would have been slightly personal, no doubt; but the temptation to one who possesses humour must, we must allow, have been considerable. Of the society, however, to be found in the ladies' drawing-room your daughter appears to be quite independent, if I may judge from these charming flowers. They are nature itself. I was afraid that it was an occupation that had died out with our young ladies—a lost art, like the green tint in painted windows and the exquisite old lace of——"

"They are *mine!*" interrupted Mrs. Jennynge, with modest triumph.

Considering that Mr. Josceline had heard all about this particular manufactory of wax flowers from

Ella, the extremity of astonishment manifested in his features was most creditable to him. He looked from Mrs. Jennynge to her violets, and from her violets to Mrs. Jennynge, as though he were doubting which of them was wax, and which the lovely and odorous offspring of nature.

"It is miraculous!" he murmured.

What in reality, however, struck him as much more extraordinary was the spectacle of Anastasia with her thumb in her mouth, which at this moment he beheld in the looking-glass. He was unaware, of course, that this was equivalent to the hoisting the drum in Admiral Fitzroy's signal system; but he saw by the lowering of her brow that a storm was brewing, and felt he had pushed his compliments to her mother too far. The human mind is able to bear a very considerable weight of personal flattery, but it is often impatient of a penny-weight when the flattery is addressed to a third person.

"I have often thought," said Mr. Josceline, musing, "that the combinations of which art is capable have never been sufficiently experimented upon. A picture was shown me the other day of the home garden of a noble friend of mine, with photographs of his family, reduced to the proper comparative size, sitting on the seats and in the arbours. The effect was a little stiff, but the idea seemed to me capable of development. Now why should not these exquisite flowers be made to form a foreground in some beautiful landscape, such as I see on yonder table?"

"It would spoil them both," said Anastasia curtly.

"Pardon me, my dear young lady," said Mr. Josceline, taking up the work of art in question and ex-

amining it with great minuteness, "we cannot tell till we have tried. This is a very delicate specimen of the master indeed, and there is no doubt of the master; it is a Birket Foster."

"Oh, dear no, that's mine," said Anastasia briskly.

"Yours? You astound me!" ejaculated Mr. Josceline. "I took it for an original which you had set yourself to copy. Dear me! If my Ella could only paint like this I should never venture to criticise. She told me that you were a most marvellous performer—but really this——"

"I think Anastasia has a natural gift for painting," observed Mrs. Jennynge.

"Natural gift, my dear madam! It is genius. In your daughter's presence I dare not say what I think of it, and I am thought to have some little taste in these matters too. I am not one to praise, I hope, without discrimination. Now this again"—he took up another specimen—"has vigour and skill; the trained hand and eye are very perceptible; the execution perhaps is even better; but the conception, the exquisite suggestiveness of the other, is wanting in it."

"Why, lor bless me!" exclaimed Mrs. Jennynge—"that's Mr. Felspar's. He left it for my daughter to copy. Didn't he, Statty?"

"Yes, that is Mr. Felspar's," said Anastasia, her countenance beaming with pride and delight, but also, as was usual with her when excited, growing very red in the wrong places.

"Well, all I can say is," said Mr. Josceline with an air of conviction, "that in my opinion Mr. Felspar has very little to teach you, my dear Miss Jennynge. What admirable perspective! How softly the dis-

tances are made to mingle! This is an unexpected treat indeed."

The observation of course referred to the picture, but just at that moment the coffee was brought in, which made the application of the remark a little vague.

"Do you take cream or hot milk?" observed Mrs. Jennynge anxiously. "It was very remiss in me, as I told you, not to have taken note of that."

"Indeed, my dear madam, it is very good of you even to profess an interest in my poor tastes and fancies. I take black coffee, thank you."

"Black coffee!" exclaimed Mrs. Jennynge regretfully. "I am afraid they have got nothing blacker than this in the house."

The visitor was here attacked by such a severe cough that it brought the water into his eyes.

"Mr. Josceline means, mamma," said Anastasia, in that tone of reproach she always used when her mother made a social mistake, "that he takes his coffee without milk or cream."

"La, now, I'd just as soon take a black dose," observed her mother, making a wry face.

"It is an acquired taste, no doubt," said Mr. Josceline gently. "We men are the slaves of habit."

"Ah, I know what that means," observed his hostess. "My poor dear Nathaniel always used to use those words in apology for taking something he was fond of, but which disagreed with him, or which he was afraid I should find fault with, such as a glass of gin and water. If you want a cigarette, Mr. Josceline, pray take one. I don't at all object to smoke."

"You are an enchantress, Mrs. Jennynge," exclaimed Mr. Josceline, "and can read the innermost thoughts of us poor mortals."

"I think I understand the men," answered his hostess modestly. "Get Mr. Josceline a light, Statty."

"But are you sure *you* don't object to the smell of tobacco, Miss Anastasia?" inquired the visitor with solicitude.

"I like it," answered the young lady with enthusiasm. After that eulogium upon her water-colour drawings, she would have professed to like the smell of boiling cabbage-water, if that should have been the Hon. George Emilius Josceline's favourite tippie.

From that moment the visitor was on velvet; for such is the gracious influence of tobacco upon the cultivated mind that it strengthens us to endure the society of the tedious, while at the same time it so admirably matures and elevates the intelligence that we say nothing we ought not to say unless we are quite convinced it would be gratifying to our audience. From that moment Mr. Josceline carried on his little game of three-handed battledore with comparative ease; he gave the shuttlecock to each, not indeed in turn, but after just such an interval as prevented her from growing impatient, while he contrived to convince the other that he was temporarily depriving her of it not willingly, but in order to allay the flame of jealousy, or to extinguish the spark of suspicion. There was one thing, however, which Mr. Josceline was very anxious to effect, but with all his art had hitherto failed to compass. He wished to get rid of Anastasia, and to find himself alone with Mrs. Jennynge. To turn a young lady out of her own drawing-room with-

out assigning any reason for it except that she is *dé trop*, is a very difficult operation, as many of us in our youth may have had cause to remember, and this difficulty is greatly increased if she is the rival in our affections with the remaining occupant of the apartment. It is humiliating to confess the failure of so great a diplomatist, but after a couple of hours of conversation Mr. Josceline had only succeeded in the very easy task of charming his hearers, and was as far off from the object with which he had sought their society as when he began.

"I am afraid I must be going," he said, "for though I could sit up all night in such society, I should suffer for it (as one suffers for all one's pleasures, alas!) to-morrow. Late hours for the present are forbidden to me."

"How one hates doctors!" observed Anastasia with a gentle sigh.

"It would be a mitigation of their severe sentence," continued the visitor, "if I might take that landscape of yours away with me—not to keep, of course."

"I am sure you are very welcome to it," said Anastasia earnestly.

Here an outbreak of jealousy might not without reason have been expected from Mrs. Jennynge. On the contrary, that lady smiled her sweetest smile, and in her tenderest voice exclaimed: "No, my dear Anastasia, I cannot permit you to give Mr. Josceline that picture when you have the lovely Como landscape to give him instead; it would give him a much better impression of your talents."

"But the Como is upstairs, mamma," pouted Anastasia, "at the bottom of the trunk."

"Never mind. I am sure you will not grudge a little trouble for our friend Mr. Josceline; fetch it, darling."

As to woman's tact, I have always had my doubts about it, but in the way of duplicity towards one another they are peerless. By this admirable arrangement Mrs. Jennynge had secured her daughter's absence for full five minutes. The door had scarcely closed behind her ere Mr. Josceline took advantage of his long sought opportunity.

"In Miss Anastasia's presence," he said in his most dulcet tones, "I could hardly ask you the question, my dear Mrs. Jennynge, which has been trembling on my lips.

Mrs. Jennynge murmured in an affrighted tone, "Dear me, what question?" and put on the same expression, as nearly as she could recall it, which she had worn when her lost mate, or rather her penultimate, had demanded her virgin hand, more than a quarter of a century ago. And here it was that Mr. Josceline's experience failed him. He did not understand—what was the actual fact—that the widow was awaiting an offer of marriage there and then. He expected a little more delay and coquetry; and, though he meant to make his approaches very rapidly, it had not entered his mind to carry the widow's heart by a *coup de main*. One loses many things by over-refinement, though not often, as in this case, 5,000*l.* a year.

"I was going to ask you," he went on with gentle tenderness, "whether the report of your departure from the *Ultramarine* had any foundation in fact. I heard it spoken of at the *table-d'hôte*, of course, but

something within me bade me hope that there might be some mistake. The tidings seemed too sad—I had almost said too terrible—to be believed.”

“What can it signify to anybody, dear Mr. Josceline,” returned the widow, with tender melancholy, “whether a poor forlorn creature like myself goes away or stops?”

“I don’t know as to *anybody*,” replied Mr. Josceline; “I can only answer for myself. To me your departure would be a misfortune indeed.”

“Do you really wish me to stay, then, a little longer? Really?” and the widow modestly lowered her eyes, and gave her hand a well-practised turn which exposed a bouquet of diamonds.

“I do. I implore it,” whispered Mr. Josceline eagerly.

“Then I remain,” she answered. “Hush, here’s Anastasia,” and she drew her fingers back from Mr. Josceline’s tender grasp with such celerity that she actually left one of her rings in his hand. Even the temporary acquisition of such an article under such peculiar circumstances would have been a source of embarrassment to some people; but Mr. Josceline merely slipped it into his waistcoat pocket with one hand, while he took the Como from Anastasia with the other.

“This is indeed a masterpiece,” he said, and then fell into an art-ecstasy; a performance which to him was as easy as stroking a cat.

“And am I really to keep it?” he inquired, as he rose to take his departure.

“By all means,” said Anastasia delightedly; “let me put it up in paper for you.”

In the rustle which this proceeding occasioned, the widow contrived to whisper, "And you will keep *my* little gift too," in Mr. Josceline's ear.

"I have given a ring or two away in my time," reflected that gentleman when he found himself in his own apartment, "and in each case with a certain significance attaching to it. But I don't remember any one having given *me* an 'engaged ring' before; and it's not leap year, neither. However, the lady's booked, which is a great relief—my poor dear Ella."

CHAPTER XXIV.

A CHANGE OF VIEWS.

ON the evening of the same day on which Mr. Josceline and his daughter had visited Clover Cottage, Mrs. Gammer brought her two lodgers the tidings of little Davey's illness. The young men were greatly distressed by it, for the child was a favourite with them both; and Felspar at once went up to the hotel to volunteer his services as sick nurse, which Vernon would also have done but that the state of his wounded hand for the present rendered him useless for such a post. Felspar's assistance was of course declined, since the two ladies were already installed as nurses; and, as Mrs. Armytage cynically observed, "It would hardly have done to turn the Prior's House into an Agapemone." From inquiries made at the doctor's, it seemed that nothing was known for certain as to the nature of the illness; but among the little world of Wallington Bay it was represented, of course, as most alarming. Though some well-meaning attempts have been made of late years to discourage "sen-

sation," they have not been wholly successful; and I am inclined to think that there is something in human nature itself which welcomes the thing, and has always done so, though of old it may have gone under some other name. With those who live dull, uneventful lives, in particular, anything out of the common way is attractive, even if it be a misfortune, provided only, of course, that it has not happened to themselves.

In Felspar's absence, Mrs. Gammer discoursed to his friend upon the topic with much satisfaction, and dwelt with unction upon the very gloomiest view of the case. "After all, Mr. Walter, we must all die, young or old; it don't much matter, for it is only a question of a year or two."

"My dear Mrs. Gammer," said Vernon, "you speak like a philosophical work, but even philosophy may be overdone. It would make me very uncomfortable, for example, to think you yourself would only live a year or two, and little Davey is much younger than you."

"That's true, Mr. Vernon; and though, thank Heaven, I never have an ache or a pain, I don't feel so much of a permanency as I did."

The term permanency in her mouth was characteristic; her calling coloured her whole existence; man, in her eyes, seemed not so much a tenant for life as a lodger, more or less liable to quit at a moment's notice.

"But these little people are soon up, as well as soon down," urged Vernon cheerfully.

"Ah, but, mind you, the poor child is delicate, and a very bad subject for a disease of any kind. Fever, they say, comes from drains, as is like enough;

for my part I don't hold with these new-fangled inventions—sanitaries and what not; and there have been no drains in Wallington to my knowledge, and, until this present one, no fevers either. Now in Lawton—for I ha' been there scores o' times and smelt it—they've got what they call a sewage system, and the consequence is mumps is never out of the place. What I was going to say is, that fevers and drains is very much alike; you never know, as any landlady will tell you, if once you begin them, when you come to the end of drains; and it's the same with fevers, we can hardly expect that the mischief will stop with poor little Davey. There's poor Miss Josceline——”

“There's nothing the matter with Miss Josceline, surely?” interrupted Vernon, taking his pipe from his mouth (a sure sign with him of great perturbation of mind).

“Not yet; but she's volunteered to nurse the child, and is shut up with him and the nurse, and Mrs. Wallace, and Mr. Aird; they are all together, they tell me, in the Prior's House, in a galantine; so I reckon they must be keeping pretty close.”

“In quarantine,” you mean, Mrs. Gammer. “Well, of course, it's right to cut them off from the rest of the people in the hotel; but, dear me, though it is just like her kind heart, how very rash of Miss Josceline to volunteer for such a duty.”

“Well, I don't know as to that, Mr. Vernon; it is just as rash of Mr. Felspar, and I must say a little selfish too, for if he was took with the fever, there's a lodger gone from Clover Cottage. After all, it's woman's work, is nussing, and I should think Miss Josceline would be the very one for it.”

"Why?"

"Well, she's gentle in her ways, and cheerful, and she won't go trapesing and trailing along the floors, as Miss Jennynge do, with that precious train of hers; why, that young woman couldn't stoop over a pillow, to give a drop of medicine to a body, or what not, for fear of busting her stays. Then there's Mrs. Armytage—she'd be no sort of use in a sick-room, I reckon; to have a will of your own is one thing, but she's too masterful; she'd take her own way with the patient (if she took him in hand at all, which I doubt), in spite of what the doctor might say; but Miss Josceline, she's of another sort, tractable, and gentle, and yet with plenty of sense. One can see that with half an eye."

"Mrs. Gammer," said Vernon, "you were saying the other day you would like a set of the 'Mayfair Keepsake' for your parlour book-shelf; how would you like it bound?"

"Lor, sir, I never said it serious, but only because you seemed to take to it so much yourself; and on wet days, when they've got no books, lodgers is so trying. 'If Mr. Vernon likes it, being such a judge,' says I, 'it must be first-class reading; and then there are the pictures.'"

"The 'Keepsake' has some excellent things in it, no doubt," returned Vernon. "You shall have a copy of it next week, Mrs. Gammer, because—because you're a good woman."

"You're very kind, I'm sure, to say so, Mr. Walter," said the landlady, the usual peony tint of her complexion assuming the hue of beetroot. "It's a comfort I'm sure, in this world, when one finds one's efforts to do

one's duty appreciated, and more especially by one's lodger."

Vernon, however, did not hear her; he was wrapped in thought: the question of blue and gold, or green and gold, as a bidding for the "Keepsake," was perhaps agitating his mind; so his companion believed, at all events, and, being a woman of much judgment in practical matters, she left him to his reflections.

Mr. Felspar had little to tell his friend with which we are unacquainted, and he found the task of breaking to him the fact of Ella's voluntary exposure to the danger of infection much easier than he had anticipated. Vernon remarked that to hear of such an act of self-sacrifice was only what he had expected, which, considering that he was already acquainted with the circumstances, was very true. The comparative coolness with which he received the news was so far satisfactory to his friend that it convinced him he had taken the right course in not communicating to Vernon what Mr. Josceline had told him respecting Ella's position and prospects. It would be time enough to do that should Vernon's intentions prove more serious. He could not, however, help contrasting the shock which the news of Miss Josceline's quixotic conduct had produced upon himself, when Mrs. Trant had informed him of it, with the quiet manner in which Vernon had received it. It was the privilege of the young, who find women at their feet, he reflected bitterly, to be philosophic.

Yet all that night Vernon tossed sleeplessly in his bed, fevered, not with his wound, but with anxieties and forebodings founded on those careless words dropped by Mrs. Gammer, "One can hardly expect

that the mischief will stop with little Davey." He pictured Ella, like some idealised Miss Nightingale, devoting herself to the case of her little patient till contagion struck her down, and health, and perhaps life itself, were sacrificed on the altar of devotion. As for Mr. Josceline permitting his daughter to undertake such a task, he could find no sort of explanation of it; unless he was so inordinately selfish that nothing awoke his fears that did not imperil his own personal safety, the man must be mad. Even Mr. Felspar, though he had so much more data to draw conclusions from, did not guess Mr. Josceline's real motive in thus acting; indeed he did not imagine that he had any motive at all, but set down his conduct to sheer carelessness, and a dislike to contemplate serious possibilities.

Directly after breakfast the next morning, Mr. Felspar repaired to the hotel to make inquiries. He found things pretty much as they were. The little patient had passed an uneasy night; but no fresh symptoms had declared themselves. Of course none of the party in quarantine were visible, and, having obtained what information he could from Mrs. Trant, the painter was passing out on his road home when Mrs. Jennynge beckoned him in from her window. She was generally much at her ease with Felspar, whom, being poor, she naturally regarded as a person of no consequence, and also as being for the present, at least, in her employment; but on this occasion he noticed that she wore a look of some embarrassment, and that her tone was one of unwonted affability and conciliation. On repairing to her sitting-room he found Mrs. Jennynge alone, seated at her usual table

by the window, where the manufactory of wax flowers was carried on, and in the act of designing a blush rose. If he had recollected that, as a rule, she devoted her artistic talents to flowers of the funereal sort only, this fact would have been significant; but, as it was, it escaped his attention. He inquired after his pupil, Miss Anastasia, and was told she had gone out for a constitutional.

"The fact is," added Mrs. Jennynge, with a nervous giggle, "I was rather glad of it, since her absence gives me an opportunity of speaking to you a few words in private."

"In private?" echoed Mr. Felspar, in an astonished tone.

The lady's colour was high, her voice timid if not tender, and her whole manner what the vulgar term flustered. Taking all this in connection with the manipulation of the blush rose, the painter was a little alarmed. He was not naturally more conceited than most of us—indeed he was less so; but it did strike him (with a shiver), for one passing instant, that Mrs. Jennynge had fallen in love with him, and was about to make him an offer of marriage.

"Yes, on business," she continued, "if that can be called such which has been a labour of love with you, as you have told us all your work is."

"Oh, I see, the portrait," interposed Felspar. It was impolite of him to interrupt her, but the sense of relief he experienced had been considerable, and the observation escaped him involuntarily.

"Yes, the portrait of my late husband." (He noticed that she did not say as usual, when referring to that departed saint, "my lost Nathaniel.") "It is

unpleasant to have to say so, Mr. Felspar, but the likeness does not give me satisfaction."

"Indeed! Of course these things are a matter of opinion, Mrs. Jennynge," replied the painter quietly, "but certainly not a week ago you expressed your entire approval of it."

"Did I? Then I think that must have been merely to spare your feelings."

Mr. Felspar smiled an amused smile, which spoke a volume: it seemed to say, "From what I know of your character, madam, that seems to me in the highest degree improbable."

She knew what the smile meant well enough, for the flush of embarrassment gave way at once to the deeper flush of anger.

"Well, at all events I don't like it now," said she bluntly.

"What's the matter with it?" inquired Mr. Felspar coolly, drawing back the curtain that concealed the picture standing on its easel. It struck him that some accident had happened to it, which might have induced a lady with a keen eye for her own advantage, such as he knew Mrs. Jennynge to be, to wish to cancel or amend her agreement. But there it stood as he had left it, not, perhaps, so idealised a presentment of her "lost Nathaniel" as the widow might have desired, but undoubtedly a good likeness so far as it went, and it was almost finished.

"It is neither this nor that which is the matter," said Mrs. Jennynge, regarding the portrait with marked disfavour; "it does not suggest to me the late Mr. Jennynge at all." Then, as if conscious that she had not expressed his relationship to her very pathetically,

she added, in a tone broken by emotion, "I miss the smile; I miss the voice."

"The smile, madam," said Felspar coldly, "I can, if you please, make more pronounced, though it does not appear in the original; but as to the voice, that is certainly beyond me. A painter seldom succeeds in delineating the speech."

The contemptuousness of his tone was extreme, and his companion felt it. It did not shame her, but it convinced her that she had started on the wrong tack; she had been wrong in supposing that the artist could be bullied.

"My dear Mr. Felspar," she said, "do not let us dispute upon this matter, which after all, as you have said, is one of mere opinion. You are satisfied, it seems, but I am not. Our arrangement was, I think, that I was to pay you a hundred pounds—fifty pounds on the completion of the sketch, which sum you have already received, and fifty pounds on the completion of the oil painting."

"Which will be finished in three or four days at most," observed Mr. Felspar quietly.

"I don't know about that, I'm sure, but I don't want it finished at all."

"Oh, I see. I have heard something of your intention to leave Wallington Bay, but instead of telling me of it in a straightforward manner, and asking to be off your bargain, you wish to find an excuse for dissatisfaction with my work."

The speech was certainly far from conciliatory, but there was one thing in it which mitigated its severity to the person addressed. Mrs. Jennynge was relieved to find that Mr. Felspar attributed her change of

views to her proposed departure from the hotel—an intention which, as we know, she had abandoned.

“Well,” said she naïvely, and without an attempt to resent his imputation, “it seems hard to pay for a thing we don’t want, doesn’t it?”

“I might retort, madam,” answered Felspar, his words falling slowly and coldly, like the droppings from an icicle, “that it seems also hard to have had to do work for nothing. But I am not in the habit of bargaining about my pictures. The law would award me the full amount agreed upon, since I am ready to fulfil my part of our contract; but I am content to waive my rights.”

“And to charge me nothing?” exclaimed Mrs. Jennynge, in a tone less of gratitude than of expectancy.

“Nothing.”

“Now, I call that handsome,” said Mrs. Jennynge admiringly; “very handsome. I have often heard of the generosity of Art, and so on, but I never believed it. Mr. Felspar, you are a gentleman.”

Mr. Felspar looked at her with an inquiring glance, as though he would have said, “How should *you* know?” but the implied sarcasm flew over her head; she only felt that she had made an excellent bargain.

“I am sure, my dear sir,” she continued effusively, “we part the best of friends. Any further lessons, by-the-by, you may be good enough to give my daughter must be no longer given *as* a friend. I must insist upon your being remunerated for them.”

“But I thought you were going away?” said Mr. Felspar.

“To be sure, I forgot that,” said Mrs. Jennynge,

for the first time looking really abashed. "Our departure, however, is not quite certain."

Mr. Felspar, to intimate that there were no doubts on that point in his own case, took up his hat. He was about to leave her, with a distant bow, when she stopped him.

"I again repeat you have behaved most nobly, Mr. Felspar; but about the cheque?"

"What cheque?"

"Well, the fifty pounds. I mean, of course, the first fifty. You will send it back to me, I conclude, in the course of the day. We *may* be leaving the hotel, and at all events, as my poor husband used to say, 'short settlements make long friends.'"

"I wish your husband was alive, madam, and acting towards me as you have done. Then I could tell him what I thought of his behaviour. As you are a lady that is unfortunately impossible."

"Do you mean to say you are going to keep that first fifty, after all?"

"Most decidedly I am. If I was as rich as you, and you were as poor as I, I should doubtless return it to you as a free gift, but, as it is, I should as soon think of making over to you my last year's income. Good morning, madam."

"I don't think much of artists," murmured Mrs. Jennynge when he had left the room. "However, I have got half the money back, which was more than was to be expected." Then she took the picture off the easel and placed it on the floor with its back to the wall. The model of her lost Nathaniel after death had been already stowed away out of sight, and now she collected his photographs and put them without much ceremony into the table-drawer.

Having thus cleared the apartment of all the touching mementoes of the departed, she returned with a sigh of relief to the construction of the blush rose which she intended for the Hon. George Emilius Josceline.

CHAPTER XXV.

IN QUARANTINE.

THE sharp contrasts of which the world is full are sharpest, not between rich and poor, I think (though, Heaven knows, those are clearly defined enough), but between the hale and the sick. It is true that riches may be the lot of the healthy, and sickness that of the poor, in which case the question of compensation becomes (to the unphilosophic mind) importunate indeed; but there is no need for our present purpose to come face to face with that. There was difference enough between the mode of life pursued by the tenants of the *Ultramarine* in general, and that of that portion of them cut off from the rest by the double doors which divided it from the Prior's House or Hostel. In the one case there was Mr. Josceline wooing and winning; Mrs. Jennynge, in an Indian summer of rapture; and Miss Anastasia, beginning to suspect what was going on, and something more than disgusted at somebody's conduct — which, however, was a mystery to her. Mr. Josceline's arrival with four horses had effected even more than he had given them credit for; they had put it beyond all question that he had the means suitable to his birth, and "What on earth he could see in her mamma?" was the inquiry Miss Jennynge was for ever naturally putting to herself. She was not absolutely jealous of her mother, for though she would have had no ob-

jection to become the Hon. Mrs. Josceline herself, her affections were not involved in the matter; but she said to herself privately that "there was no fool like an old fool," and that Mr. Josceline must be mad." Otherwise, being a judicious young woman in most matters relating to her own interest, she made no fuss about it, and even pretended not to see what was going on. Mrs. Jennynge had told the simple truth when she said that her daughter was absolutely dependent on her; and therefore it behoved Anastasia to keep her suspicions to herself, though as time went on they became amply corroborated. The absence of her late papa's photograph from the parlour wall, and the disappearance of the cast of his countenance, had been significant enough; but now she noticed a certain ring upon Mr. Josceline's finger about which there could be no question, except how in the world her mother, being much afflicted with rheumatism in the joints, could ever have slipped it over her knuckles. Also, though secrets are said to lie under the rose, there was a blush rose in wax in Mr. Josceline's sitting-room, which, so far from concealing anything from Miss Anastasia, told her everything.

Mrs. Armytage, however, knew nothing of what was taking place; but since, for Mrs. Jennynge's sake, Mr. Josceline had once or twice taken up the cudgels against her, the Professor's wife had grown bitter against him, and even described his "goings on" as disgraceful. Indeed, partly to conceal his profounder designs, but also because flirtation was natural to him, Mr. Josceline did, in his daughter's absence, make himself exceedingly agreeable, not only to Anastasia, who only pretended to like it, but to Mrs. Percival Lott, who liked it very much.

In the Prior's Hostel, if there was no flirtation, there was a great deal of reciprocal affection of another kind. Mr. Aird, when not at his post by little Davey's pillow, could never sufficiently exhibit, though more by his manner than his words, his sense of the generous kindness of the two ladies who, at such inconvenience, and even peril, to themselves, had undertaken to nurse his beloved child; and the two women loved one another, and the little patient clung to both of them (though always most to Ella), and drew their hearts more and more closely to him every day. The fever had not abated, though, as Dr. Cooper remarked of it, it ought to have done so; the more dangerous symptoms had disappeared, but the child's rest was broken and uneasy, and he awoke from his slumbers unrefreshed. The immediate cause of this was nightmare. In the middle of the night, he would wake up shrieking and pointing to the foot of his bed, where, as he said, stood a spectre. This ridiculous idea, was, of course, combated by all about him, but without effect, and the incident had occurred twice. The ayah had always slept in his room. On the first night Ella had remained with him till nearly midnight, when she had been relieved at her post by Mrs. Wallace, and on the second the latter lady had remained till the attack, if such it could be called, took place. She protested with much energy that she had never closed an eye, but Davey had whispered to Ella that both his nurse and Mrs. Wallace were asleep, and had been awakened by his crying out, but too late to see the "dark man." Upon the personal appearance of this gentleman, so vaguely described, it was thought best not to question him, but they all agreed that it was either some reminiscence of the

mild Hindoo that haunted the child's dreams, or some fancied metamorphosis of Abra herself. Neither of the two ladies was in the least given to superstition, and though, as it afterwards turned out, Mr. Aird himself had a very pronounced taste for the horrible, he had never developed it in their presence. Ella suggested that the little patient should change his room, whereat Dr. Cooper only shrugged his shoulders: "That could be done, of course," he meant to imply, "but the dark man was no more to be evaded by that means than the black care which sits behind the horseman is to be shaken off by a change of steed."

"Well, it is my watch to-night," said Ella, "and we will try it once more." And she used the word "watch" with a meaning; for she was secretly resolved not to go to sleep at all.

Her proper place was in that too comfortable arm-chair in which (as Ella shrewdly suspected) Mrs. Wallace had succumbed to the seductions of Morpheus; but no sooner were the three settled for the night, and Abra, as usual, had fallen fast asleep, than the child besought Ella to lie down beside him—"Then I shall not fear," he said, "even if the dark man comes again."

He had made this request once before, when she had been keeping a shorter watch by his bedside; but she had persuaded him not to press it. Dr. Cooper had told her that to sleep with the child would be to "fly in the face of Providence;" for, if any mischief was really brewing, she would in that case be certain to suffer from it. But on this occasion the little fellow's appeal was so urgent, and his apprehensions so obvious, that she consented. Though she had never been troubled in that way herself, she had

known imaginative girls at school to suffer much from nervousness at night, and her tender heart at once melted within her; and when, as soon as little Davey's arms were round her neck and his fears at rest, he sank into a tranquil slumber, she felt that she had already had her reward.

As she lay very quiet, for fear of disturbing him, her thoughts wandered over her past life, and, as usual, reverted to the mother whom she had never known, and had been tacitly forbidden to speak of. Had she herself, she wondered, when a little child, much younger than Davey, ever lain in loving arms, and been rocked to sleep on a mother's bosom? A dim recollection of a house with a porched door, that looked out upon flowers and shrubs, was all that remained to her of her first home. While still of very tender years she had been transferred to Miss Steele's care, at Minerva House, where no reference to her past had ever been made. The girls, indeed—several batches of whom had come and gone in her time—had occasionally asked her questions upon that point; but, as it was manifest that she could not gratify their curiosity, the subject was soon dropped. When Davey got well she made up her mind on the first opportunity to endeavour to learn from her father what he could tell her of her own childhood; that was how she put it even to herself. There was something in his studied reticence concerning his wife that forbade her to seek for information more directly. If even he would speak of his own past, she would not feel herself so utterly bereft of all ties of association. It was the absence of these, perhaps, that caused her mind to revert with interest to recent events, and made her exaggerate the claims of mere

acquaintanceship. But presently she fell to thinking of Mr. Felspar, who had been so kind to her in regard to her drawing; and then upon Mr. Vernon. Perhaps it was their common affection to her present little companion that induced it; but her thoughts, having arrived at the young poet, dwelt there. What a pleasant face he had, and what a natural and charming manner! How Mr. Aird seemed to like him, and how devoted his friend Felspar was to him! Even his landlady, Mrs. Gammer, had spoken of him, when they called at the cottage, with affectionate enthusiasm. It must be a warm and honest heart that thus attracted every one towards it. Her father, though such a favourite with society, seemed to excite admiration rather than affection in his fellow-creatures, which was no doubt to be accounted for by that very reserve which restricted the demonstration of her own love for him; but Mr. Vernon had the faculty of evoking personal regard. It was fortunate; for, as it happened, he was as destitute of family ties as herself. Open as the day, he had made no secret of the fact that he was alone in the world, and had to win his own way in it. It was but natural that the similarity of their positions in this respect should invest him, in her eyes, with an additional interest. She pictured him, to herself, growing in fame, and worthy of the reputation he was acquiring. Then her thoughts strayed to her own little picture; and would it, or would it not, she wondered, be thought worthy of the honours of print? and, if it should have that good fortune, how pleasant it would be for it to appear side by side with Mr. Vernon's poem! and what a charming souvenir it would form of her visit to Wallington Bay, and of the kind friends she had found

there! When she met Mr. Vernon, in after years, he might be a great man; but she was sure he would not have forgotten her, because of that incident of the illustration, and——

“Ella! Ella!” whispered Davey, in hushed and frightened tones, “there he is!”

“There *who* is, my darling?” she answered tenderly. “You are dreaming.”

“No, no! I saw him quite plainly!” insisted the child, with beating heart. “If I dared to look up I should see him again, in his cloak, at the foot of the bed.”

Ella strained her eyes in the direction indicated. There was a night-lamp in the room, which gave a tolerable light, but insufficient to make things distinct. “Abra! Abra!” she cried.

With a grunt and a snort the Asiatic awoke. “What is it, Missee Ella?”

“Light the candles. You see, my dear Davey, there is nothing here.”

“I saw him!” answered the child, his large eyes roving apprehensively over the room. “He stood there—just there—in his long cloak. Papa says it’s like a girl to be frightened; but I can’t help it.”

“Of course you can’t; nobody is frightened who can help it. You shall change your room to-morrow, Davey, I promise you that; and we will keep the candle alight for the rest of the night. Now you will go to sleep again, like a good boy.”

“’Es I will, dear Ella.”

She folded him in her arms, and in a few minutes slumber once more overtook him; but Ella remained awake. It might have been fancy—indeed it was folly to suppose otherwise—yet she thought she had seen a vague something at the bed-foot when the

child had first cried out. What it was she could not describe; but something with some dim resemblance to a human figure had grown shadowy and disappeared under her gaze. It gave her, she knew not how, the impression of having been more distinct before her attention was called to it. Such delusions have happened to many of us, and, most commonly, when the mind has been disturbed and thrown out of gear by unwonted circumstances. In an ancient portion of an ancestral mansion, cut off from wholesome life, it was not unlikely that an imaginative young girl should have thus partaken of the fevered fancies of her patient. That this would be the view of others, at least, Ella had the good sense to perceive; and what weighed with her much more was the conviction that the revelation of what she had seen, or thought she had seen, would only increase existing troubles. She therefore said nothing about it to her companions, nor did she mention it in the daily letter which she wrote to her father describing, always with gaiety, how life went on in the Prior's Hostel; only, for the future, she took care that Davey's apartment should be occupied by Mr. Aird (whom she justly deemed to be ghost-proof), and *vice versâ*.

It was curious, however, in spite of her prudent resolutions, how this strange incident affected not so much her spirits as her tone of thought, and, from unconscious sympathy, that of her companions. With the little patient, of course, they were always cheerful; but when alone, and not conversing about him, the topics of their talk became more serious, if not more sombre. Something was owing, no doubt, to the tightening bond of friendship, the tendency of which,

among its other blessings, is to withdraw us from the commonplace, and to substitute for the froth of the wave the wave itself. When familiarity reaches a certain point we begin to trot out our hobbies, which may, or may not, be attractive animals. Mr. Aird's was a hearse horse. He had a theory on suicide; he thought that a man had a right to dispose of his own life, if in so doing it did not affect others injuriously. This was vehemently combated by Mrs. Wallace (whose views were mildly Evangelical) upon religious grounds.

"There's nothing against it in the Scriptures," persisted Mr. Aird. "What does Miss Josceline say?"

"I don't think a soldier should leave his post before the battle is over," was the grave reply.

"Ah, that's the military view; but then you see, I am a civilian," answered Mr. Aird grimly. "Besides, I am supposing that he has no one to defend but himself."

Then he began to furnish instances from his own personal experience. One, in particular, of a husband he knew, who, having lost his only child, wrote in the fly-leaf of his Bible to his dead wife, "There is nobody left now; I have seen all I love leave the earth before me, and I come to you to-night." They were very interesting stories; but a trifle too much so for his audience, and especially under existing circumstances.

"My dear Mr. Aird, you make our flesh creep!" remonstrated Mrs. Wallace; whereupon he desisted.

Finding the enemy reduced to silence, it was only natural that the lady should fire a last shot. "You argue," said Mrs. Wallace, "that, in the case of wicked people, the very best thing they can do is 'to take

themselves off,' as you call it, since, in so doing, they do the world a service; but how can you tell that if they lived on they would continue to be wicked?"

"Because it is in accordance with experience," said Mr. Aird. "Don't you feel growing worse and worse yourself?"

But Mrs. Wallace was not to be put off by jest. There is a secret drawer in most people's minds in which they keep their serious convictions; Mr. Aird had touched it in her case, and out they came. "You have told us some strange experiences of your own life," she said; "let me tell you one of mine. Years ago, when I was a little child, my father went to Exeter for a couple of days, on business, leaving no one in the farmhouse but my aunt Esther, and myself, and some female servants. As our house was in a lonely part of the country, and since burglaries had been recently committed in the neighbourhood, he had proposed, before he went, to leave us some male protector; but my aunt had declined it. She always reminded me of what I have read of Cromwell's troops, being of great courage, and a piety such as I have never seen equalled; only she had no harshness nor uncharitableness to others. She slept alone, in the next room to me, where, for safety's sake, in my father's absence, what little plate we had was kept in an oak chest. When she went to bed at night it was her custom (for I could hear her voice, and if I listened intently, which I was sometimes tempted to do, her very words) to pray aloud, not only for ourselves, but her fellow-creatures. It was not her way to hope that a handful of human beings only, with herself and friends among them, should be saved, but the whole world, including even the wicked. She was

a simple-hearted woman, in whom whatever chanced to come to her ears out of the common made a great impression, and on this occasion what my father had said about the late robberies committed by tramps in the district recurred to her mind. It was 'borne in upon her,' as she afterwards expressed it, to beseech the Divine compassion in favour of the houseless wretches constrained, perhaps by want as much as evil habit, to break through and steal. I heard her; and then, to my astonishment and alarm, I heard a faint cry of alarm, and then two voices. They spoke together for some time, and then I heard two persons leave the room; and, after a long interval (during which I lay in a state of great trepidation), my aunt returned, and said softly, through the door, 'Are you asleep, Cicely?' and I answered, 'No,' and she came in and told me what had happened.

"When she had risen from her knees, and was about to take off her dressing-gown, her eyes fell upon the valance of the bed, from beneath which looked out two other eyes, and on meeting her gaze the person who owned them dragged himself out. He was a man (as she described him) terrible to look upon, of herculean frame, and bloated face, travel-stained and in rags, with a pair of iron-tipped shoes in his hands, which he had taken off in order to reach his late hiding-place without noise; but his voice and manner were in strange contrast to these things.

"'I came here to-night, lady, to rob your house,' he said. 'I have been lying beneath your bed for hours, rehearsing as to how it should be done, and resolved, if I met any resistance, to do worse than rob, for I am one that sticks at nothing. Then, all of a sudden, as I lay cursing your late hours, I heard

you come in and read your Bible, all alone—a thing I have never done myself, except in my prison cell, when I felt pretty sure that the chaplain's eye was at the keyhole.

““Well, this is a pious old party,” I says to myself, “but I hopes she won't be long.” But when from your Bible you went to prayer, and after praying to God Almighty for your little niece, and this, that, and the other, you came, quite naturally like, to them as never say a word to Him for themselves, and amongst them even for downright bad ones, like me, then says I, “May I be damned if I takes a penny piece from her, or hurts a hair of her grey head.”” Then replied my aunt in her quiet gentle fashion, ‘But why, unhappy man, need you be damned at all?’

“It had never struck the poor fellow, I suppose, that there had been any alternative for him, until she went on to explain it, but it is as true as I am sitting here that within five minutes this man was upon his knees repeating a prayer after her, just as a child might do at his mother's bidding. She afterwards took him downstairs and gave him some supper, of which he stood in great need, but of the money which my aunt pressed upon him he only took a very little, in order, as he said, to keep him from present temptation and set him on an honest road. My aunt made me promise to say nothing of what she told me lest the poor fellow should suffer for it, and we never heard of his getting into trouble again.”

“That is a very curious story, no doubt,” said Mr. Aird. “I won't be so ill-mannered as to say, as many people would, that it is possible your aunt caught sight of the man before she said her prayers, and framed them to suit his case; but I don't see how the

narrative bears upon your argument that wicked people may be turned into good people. Though the man did not rob your aunt, he may have gone on robbing other people."

"Let me finish my story," said Mrs. Wallace, quietly. "Years afterwards, when my aunt, then near her end, was staying at Plymouth for the sake of the sea air, and I was with her, one Sunday morning 'a very moving preacher' was advertised to hold forth in a certain chapel; and though the attraction, I confess, was greater to my aunt than to myself, I volunteered to accompany her. The preacher was a large ungainly man, looking more like a prize-fighter than a minister of the gospel; but his words had an impassioned earnestness which I have rarely heard, and which carried the congregation with them. We were too great a distance from him to see his features, but his voice reached every part of the crowded place. His theme was on the saving powers of grace, and in order to show that no man could be so fallen but that he might be raised up again, he evidenced an extreme case within his own experience. 'I knew a man once,' he said, 'who was a greater sinner than any here. He owned no Father in Heaven, no brother on Earth; his trade was robbery; by day he was a thief, and by night a house-breaker.'"

"'Oh, Aunt,' whispered I, 'did you hear that?'"

"'Yes, my dear,' she answered softly; 'that is the very man himself: I knew him directly I heard his voice.'"

"Then he went on, point by point, to describe what had happened on that eventful night at our home, and how that from the hour at which he had heard my aunt at her prayers he had become a new

and honest man; which (to cut a long story short) we afterwards found on inquiry to be the case. He had a shoemaker's shop in the town, where for years he had been much respected. So you see, Mr. Aird, that wicked people need not always put an end to themselves in despair of becoming good."

"Unfortunately, my dear madam, they very seldom do," returned the old Indian drily; "my experience is that they remain to plague the good people as much as possible. But I am glad to find that your felonious friend had some other trade than sensational preaching, which is, in my opinion, no very great improvement upon burglary with violence."

It was thus that the little party in the Prior's Hostel conversed together, on a footing more confidential and familiar than would have been possible had they been at large in the world without; and though there was no uniformity (and even, as we have seen, considerable disagreement) among them as to opinion, they were becoming close friends.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A CHANGE OF PATIENTS.

WE have been told by the lips of the wise that if we poor mortals knew what was going to happen to us—whether of good or ill—we should not find it an improvement; the nervous and despondent would, it is true, no longer make themselves miserable with imaginary sorrows, but the real ones would throw such a gigantic shadow before them as would make such men's condition even worse; while, on the other hand, the sanguine would be robbed of their hopes. The argument, no doubt, is a sound one, but never-

theless the unexpectedness of human life is one of its terrors. In the clearest sky, when all is sunshine, the clouds will hurry up from the most unlooked-for quarters, and the thunderbolt of misfortune falls; and again, when the clouds, as it would seem, have done their worst, and all has been so dark so long that some gleam of sunshine seems inevitable, the thunderbolt still falls. It is like luck at cards, which defies the doctrine of chances and puts the theory of probabilities to shame; and on the whole, or so it seems to us ungrateful mortals, it is such bad luck.

Little Davey's illness was blowing over, the fever was abating, and, what was better, losing its more dangerous features, so that Dr. Cooper was in two minds as to letting the party in the Prior's Hostel out of quarantine, when a pleasant surprise happened to two of them. The three were at breakfast together as usual (for the Doctor had made a point of their not taking their meals in the sick room), when two little parcels came by post, one containing the prettiest gold watch and chain for Mrs. Wallace, and the other a sparkling locket for Miss Josceline.

"Goodness gracious!" cried the former simply, "this can surely never be for me; there must be some mistake."

But Ella, though greatly surprised, had no doubt as to who had sent the presents, for her locket was the facsimile in shape of the one she had picked up in Abbot's Creek. Of the value of its coat of diamonds she was wholly ignorant; but she at once understood that the intention of the donor was to express his twofold gratitude to her, first for the recovery of his wife's portrait, and secondly for her attendance on his child.

"Oh, Mr. Aird!" she cried with a grateful blush,

"you are too kind. I have never seen anything so beautiful."

"I'm glad you like it, my dear young lady," replied the old gentleman, going on with his egg; "you must wear it for Davey's sake and mine. The same remark applies to your watch, Mrs. Wallace."

"But it is so much too good for me," remonstrated that lady in a rapture.

"I am sorry to contradict you for about the hundredth time since we've been shut up together," observed Mr. Aird drily; "but nothing is too good for either of you."

"Oh, I wish I could get out to show it my husband," exclaimed Mrs. Wallace.

"And I to show my locket to papa," cried Ella.

"From what Cooper said yesterday," observed Mr. Aird, "I think our prison doors will be opened tomorrow. By-the-by, what's that under the door?"

The morning letters now arrived in that fashion as all other correspondence from without; but this was not like an ordinary letter. It was much larger, though very thin, and it was directed to Miss Josceline.

"No more lockets, surely?" exclaimed Mrs. Wallace, laughing.

It was not; but it was something that gave Ella even a greater pleasure than the locket had given her. It was a proof of her illustration to Vernon's poem of the "Italian Boy," and of course gave indisputable evidence that the picture had been accepted by the "Mayfair Keepsake."

To all young people—and for that matter to old ones also—there are few joys to be compared with that of seeing their own effusions for the first time in print; and as with the writer so with the artist, and

(what is curious) especially with the indifferent artist. A poem looks ever so much better of course in print than in MS., but it is not to be compared with the improvement that takes place in a picture indifferently executed, which has been through the hands of the wood engraver. The skilled draughtsman complains, and often with justice, that his work suffers grievously from subsequent manipulation after it has left his hands; but with the novice the reverse is the case. A good engraver will supply defects, if he does not absolutely improve upon the original. At all events, whether from that cause, or from the modest opinion of her own performance, Ella thought much more highly of her "Italian Boy" in his new shape than in his old one. To her, moreover, it meant a great deal more than the mere gratification of a pardonable vanity; it gave her material hope; it was, or so it seemed to her, the first round of the ladder which might lead her in after-years, not to competence indeed (for her views were very humble), but to self-support. If such things were worth printing, she supposed that they must needs be worth paying for—however small might be the honorarium, it would be something; and she felt that she could do a good many such drawings without much injury to her brain-tissue. Besides the picture, there had come the poem it illustrated, which she read with great approbation, and with such interest and attention that when she had read it a second time she found she had got it by heart. It was because she admired it so—and much more, however incredible it may seem, than her own illustration—that she could not help showing them both to Mrs. Wallace, who fell into raptures about the wrong one. She thought the picture "so pretty," and Ella a per-

fect miracle of intelligence for having drawn it: as to the poem, she frankly confessed herself no judge of such things, but had always heard Mr. Vernon was very clever. Directly she had spoken, Ella regretted having been so confidential; the word "clever," so far from being the right term to use, sounded somehow almost depreciating; and it also struck her that Mr. Vernon might not relish her having exposed him to such criticism. Moreover, what was still worse, before she could restrain Mrs. Wallace's enthusiasm that lady had summoned Mr. Aird to "come and look at Miss Josceline's beautiful drawing," which covered the poor girl with confusion. It was one thing to have confided her secret to a motherly friend of her own sex, and quite another to share it with Mr. Aird.

"Poems are not much in my way," said that gentleman with his usual frankness, "but the picture is charming; I had no idea you were an artist, Miss Ella."

"Nor I either," replied she with an uncomfortable laugh; "Mrs. Wallace ought not to have shown it to you."

"There is nothing to be ashamed of, I am sure," said Mr. Aird good-naturedly, but also with a certain gravity which did not escape her. "Are you in the habit of illustrating Mr. Vernon's poems?"

"I have never done but this one. How could it be otherwise?" inquired Ella simply, but with a blush that would rise to her cheek in spite of all her efforts.

"To be sure; you've only known him a few days, have you?" was the quiet reply. "The proof-sheet is damp, I see; he has lost no time in sending you what he knew would give you pleasure."

"I don't know whether he sent it, or Mr. Felspar,"

said Ella; "they were both very kind about my little drawing—I mean about helping me to get it published."

"It is Mr. Vernon's handwriting," remarked Mr. Aird drily, "so it is probable it was he who sent it."

Then Mrs. Wallace burst out laughing.

"Why do you laugh?" inquired Ella, feeling almost angry with that excellent lady, though she could not have explained, even to herself, why she should be so.

"Mrs. Wallace laughs," said Mr. Aird, "because she thinks you had not much doubt in your own mind as to which of those young gentlemen sent the picture. But you see I am not so rude. I am as grave as a judge, which, indeed, I was at one time. But there is Dr. Cooper. Will he let us out of prison to-day or not, I wonder?"

Ella esteemed the good doctor greatly, but his arrival had never been so welcome to her as it was at that particular moment.

She was not one of those young ladies who rather like being rallied about a young gentleman's attentions to them than otherwise, but the question presented itself even to her (and added to her embarrassment), Would she have taken it to heart so much, if her heart had not been concerned in the matter?

It fortunately happened that she had at once something else to think of, for the Doctor's verdict was that the child was convalescent, and that all danger might now be considered over, whether as regarded himself or others, and in a few minutes Ella was clasped in her father's arms.

"You are not looking well, papa?" were her first anxious words.

"I am quite well, darling," was his reply; "though

perhaps 'none the better,' as the schoolboys say, 'for seeing you.' Extreme joy, you know, has sometimes the same effect as sorrow. Now tell me how you have fared in your prison-house?"

There was not much to tell him that had not been already told in her daily bulletins, save what had occurred that very morning.

"Dear papa, I hope—indeed I am *sure* you will be pleased to hear that my little picture has been accepted by the magazine. And only see how much better it looks in print."

"It does, my dear," he answered quietly; "but I have seen it already. Mr. Vernon was so good as to bring a duplicate of it for me when he brought yours."

"Did he come himself, then? That was very kind of him," said Ella impulsively: the next moment the recollection of Mrs. Wallace's badinage occurred to her, and she turned crimson.

"Yes," said Mr. Josceline, keeping his eyes fixed on her face, which increased her confusion, "he came in person, and we had some conversation together. He is an estimable young man for his station in life, no doubt, but seems to entertain peculiar opinions."

"He is very well-meaning, I think," said Ella, rather inappositely.

Mr. Vernon had been kind to her, and she felt bound to say what she could for him; and the tone in which her father had spoken of him had been sufficiently severe and curt.

"No doubt," he replied; "I don't wish to imply that his opinions are bad or vicious, but only that they are not the views entertained by persons of our class. They are what I suppose would be termed Bohemian, which it is only natural they should be.

He is not quite the sort of man I should wish a son of mine—and still less a daughter—to be familiar with.”

“I am very sorry,” said Ella simply.

“Why should you be sorry, my dear? It is not likely that you and he will again be thrown together even so casually as has happened here. Your paths in life will necessarily be far apart. You must thank him, of course, though, from what he said to me, I gather that you are at least equally indebted in the matter to Mr. Felspar for the service he has done you—since you seem to consider it of some importance—and there will be an end of it.”

“Very well, papa.”

There was no despair in her tone, such as he almost feared there would be, but there was genuine disappointment. She would like to have drawn more pictures for the “Keepsake,” and to have illustrated more poems of Mr. Vernon’s. This partnership in art and letters had a certain inexplicable charm for her.

“What is that you have in your hand, my darling?” inquired Mr. Josceline, after a long and somewhat uncomfortable pause. “The case looks promising, as if it came from a jeweller’s shop.”

“Oh, the locket!” But a few minutes ago she had pictured to herself the pleasure with which she should show Mr. Aird’s present to her father, but now all that seemed to have faded away; the matter had become almost indifferent to her.

“What locket? Dear me, who could have given you this?” He had opened the case, and was regarding the splendid gift with admiration. “It must have been some very generous person.”

“It was, papa. Mr. Aird sent for it from London by way of thanks, as I suppose, for my nursing little

Davey, which I am sure I should have been glad to do at all events. It is altogether too rich a guerdon for so slight a service."

"It is very handsome, certainly, my dear; but you must not underrate your own deserts. It is very natural that a man of generous nature, like Mr. Aird, should have endeavoured to show himself sensible of them."

"But is it not very costly? I know nothing about such things, but if these are real diamonds——"

"Well, I don't think it's very likely, Ella," put in Mr. Josceline, smiling, "that Mr. Aird would have given you paste. If I am not mistaken, this did not cost less than eighty guineas."

"Eighty guineas! Oh, papa! And he has given Mrs. Wallace a gold watch and chain."

"Indeed! Well, doubtless to a man of Mr. Aird's fortune such things are but flea-bites; still it is very creditable to him. He must (as I always suspected) have a noble nature. May I look inside, my dear?"

"Inside the locket? Of course, papa. Why do you ask such a question?" inquired Ella, in unaffected surprise.

"Well, I didn't know," he answered with a smile of significance. "These little cadeaux are sometimes of a private nature. They sometimes contain a portrait of the donor, for example. However, this is empty, I see, at present."

"Yes. By-the-by, Mr. Aird was so good as to promise, papa, that he would get me a photograph of little Davey to put in it; and then, as I said to him, the other side I shall devote to one of yourself."

"I think you should not have said that, Ella," said Mr. Josceline gravely; "it was hardly gracious. You might have asked Mr. Aird for his own picture. How-

ever, it is very gratifying—very.” He drew his daughter towards him and kissed her tenderly.

“Why do you sigh, dear papa?” said Ella, alarmed by the expression of her father’s face even more than by that evidence of emotion. “I am sure you are not well.”

“Yes, darling; I am well enough, as well as I ever shall be, that is, the least thing that excites me——” and Mr. Josceline fell back in his chair with a groan of pain.

Ella flew to the bell, and then to her father’s side. “Esther, tell Dr. Cooper to come to papa directly. He has not left the house, I think, but if he has, send for him *at once*.”

Ella was frightened, but she was not one of those whom alarm deprives of their presence of mind.

She loosened her father’s neckerchief and wheeled his chair to the window.

In a few minutes, which seemed, however, an age to her, Dr. Cooper arrived.

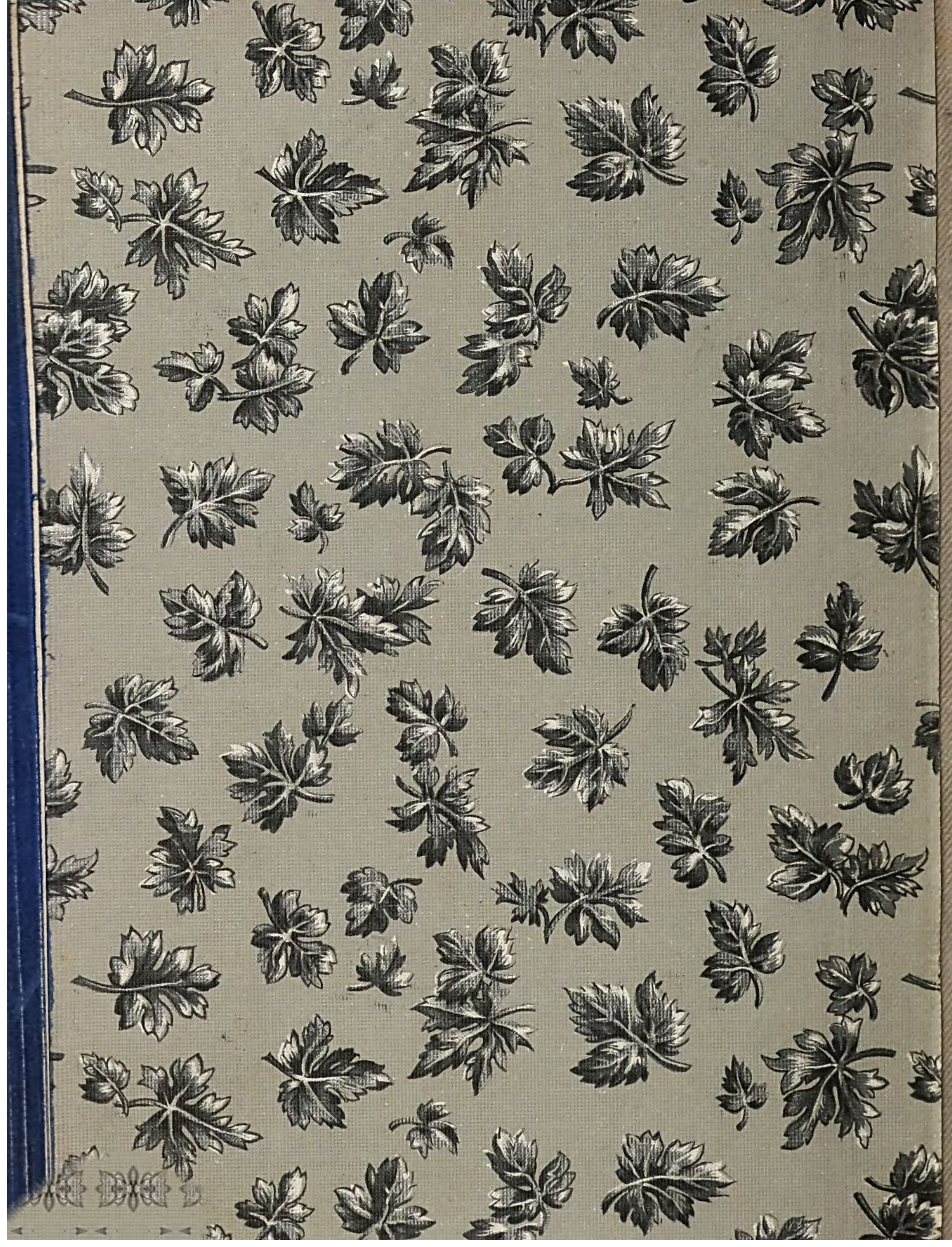
“Oh, Doctor, what is the matter?” she whispered, after he had felt the now unconscious patient’s pulse and made his investigations.

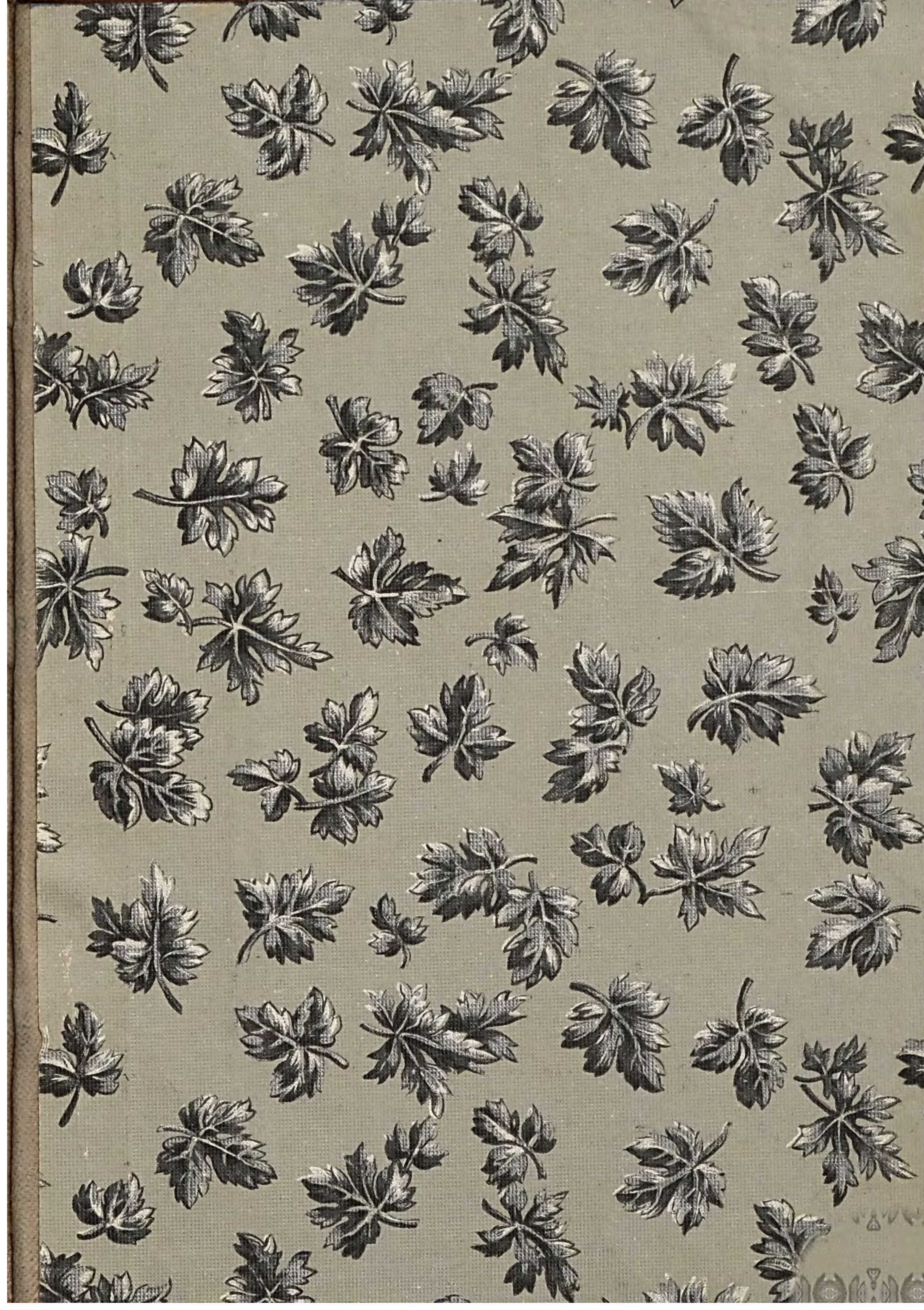
“My poor child, you must bear up,” said he evasively; “it is very hard for you to have to be sick nurse so soon again.”

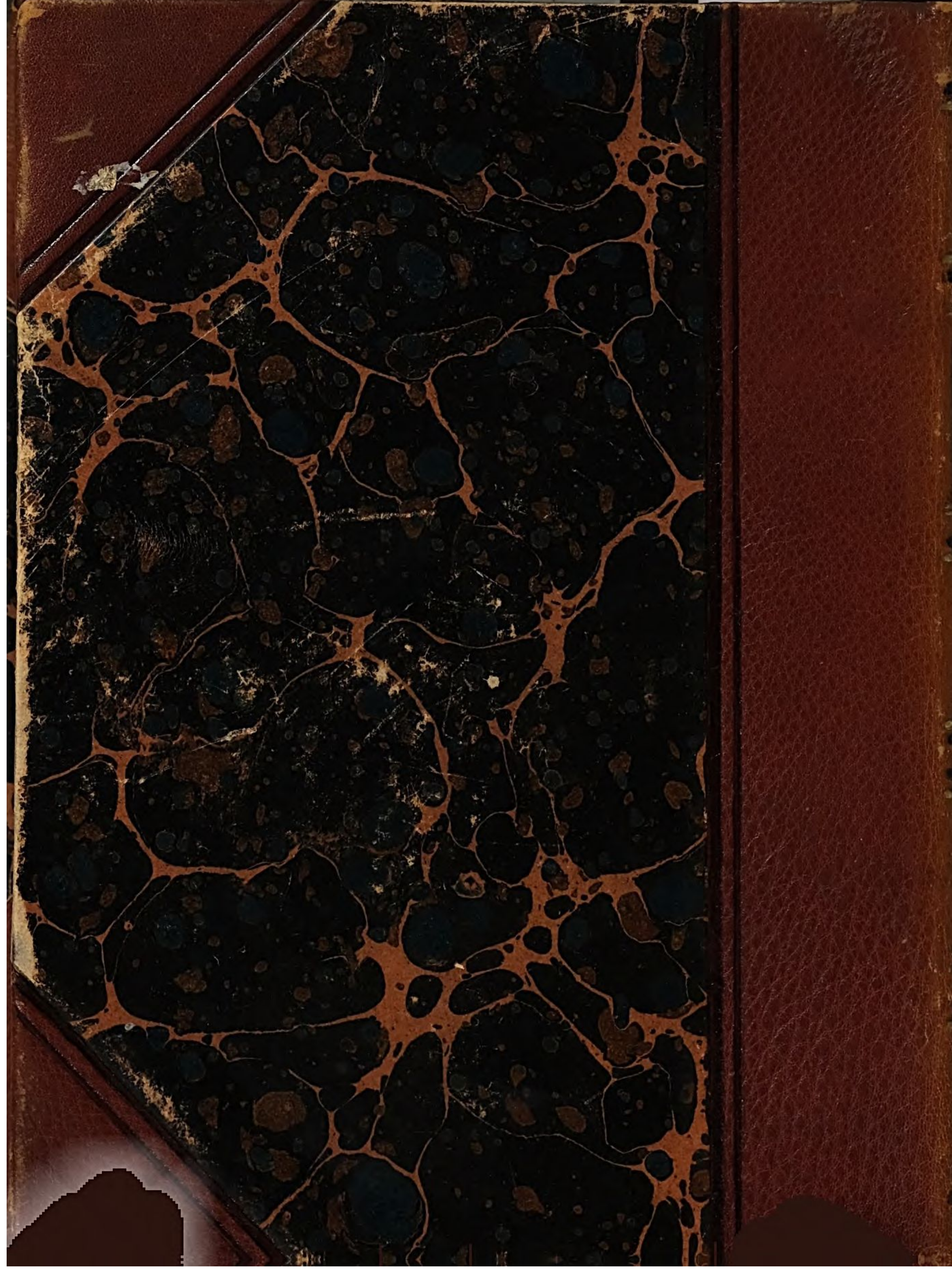
Then two of the hotel servants came in and carried her father up to his room, and he was put to bed. And Ella took her place by his pillow.

END OF VOL. I.

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